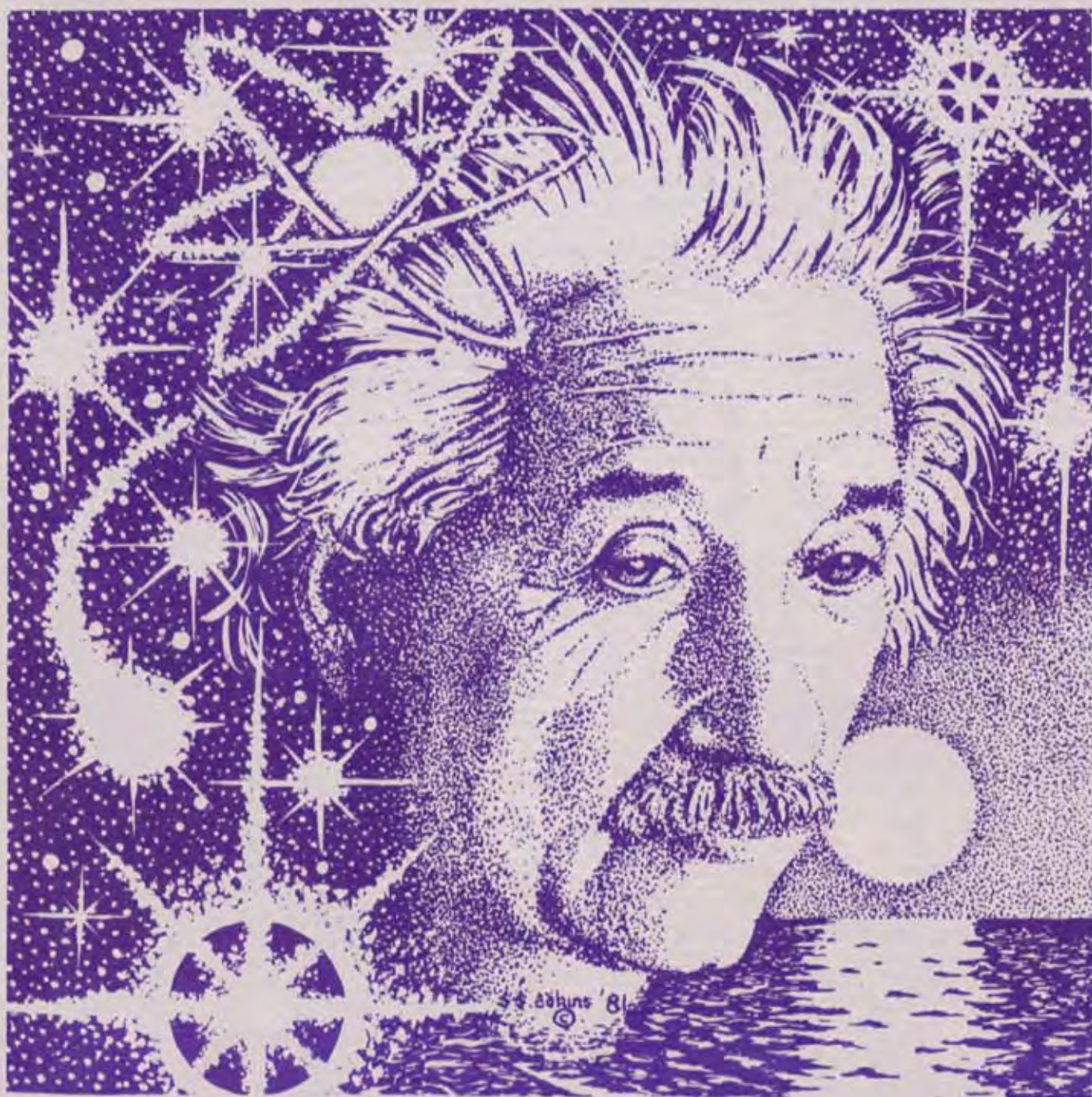


# AURORA

SPECULATIVE FEMINISM

## SF





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Jeanne Gomoll



Joe Pearson



D. Roberts



Linda Leach



Steven Fox

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## SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

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Back issues of *Aurora* are available for \$2.50 each, starting with Issue #19. Back issues of *Janus* are available for the following: photocopies of Issues 1-3, 8, and 14 for \$5.00 each; Double Issue 12/13 for \$4.00; and Issues 4-7, 9-11, and 15-18 for \$2.00 each. Back issues of the program books for WisCons 3-6 are available for \$2.00 each. Place all orders at the address below. Include \$1.00 per order for postage and handling.

Advertising and wholesale terms are available on request, also at the address below.

## WHY YOU GOT THIS ISSUE

Issues delivered by mail have a letter code on the mailing label. Here's what it means: C = you contributed; M = you were mentioned or reviewed; R = please review *Aurora*; S = you subscribe, and your last issue is indicated by number; T = we trade; and X = some other reason.

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**SF<sup>3</sup>, Box 1624, Madison, WI 53701**



## Introducing Madison BoreFandom

Some of you have been complaining that our news column is boring. You'll just have to face facts: Madison is a boring town. Boring people live here and boring things happen to them. For instance, we can't tell you who is sleeping with whom, because everybody in Madison sleeps alone. (There are a few who doubt Lucy and Kim's tale of finding Liana under a pile of old fanzines, but never mind.) Madison fandom is so boring it should be called Madison boredom. Even our gossip is boring. Scandalous Madison doings never get written up in gossipy fannish newzines unless we make them up. And talk about boring feuds! We all get along so well, there have been no murders or public denouncements in our club for weeks!

### Errata

None. Last issue was perfect. Err, except for our use of John Alexander's unfinished sketch of East African *homo habilis* illustrating Debbie Notkin's review of *Clan of the Cave Bear*, which dealt with Neanderthals. Our fault, not the artist's.

### WisCon 6 Winners

The following people were winners of the First Annual WisCon PacMan Contest: (1st) Edward Gregorson, (2nd) ?, (3rd) Mike Wood, and (4th) Bob Quinn.

At the WisCon art show, these people won prizes: Best SF (fan) Eric ("Vote For Me") Larson; Best SF (pro) ?; Best Fantasy (fan) Georgie Schnobrich; Best Fantasy (pro) Darlene Coltrain and Steven V. Johnson; and Best of Show, Steven V. Johnson.

Embarrassing things about these two lists are (a) their incompleteness (due to several people thinking that another person was writing down the names of the winners [Madison fans hate taking notes.]), and the tape recording that was supposed to cover our ass failing to work and (b) all but one of the winners of the art awards being on the con committee.

### WisCon 7 Update

Moving right along to WisCon 7 (See our ad elsewhere in this issue.), we are proud to announce author, editor, and SFWA president Marta Randall as one of our guests of honor. Watch for further developments.

Con-com coordinator this year is Diane "Spread the Blame" Martin, ably assisted by six (count 'em, six) department heads (We're really into bureaucracy.): Peter Theron (Administration), Hank Luttrell (Exhibits), Greg Rihn (Media), Phil Kaveny (Programs), Jeanne Gomoll (Public Relations), and Carrie Root (Social [Whoopie!]). Diane agreed to be coordinator if she would be exempt from typing minutes (a very unpopular task [Even we have a boredom threshold.]).

### Memorial Day Pig-Out

MadSTF's (What a boring name!) annual Memorial Day Picnic and Pig-Out, one of Madison boredom's major social events, was held in the backyard and garage of the Russell, Martin, and Luttrell residence on May 31. Threatening

# NEWS ALL THE

rain clouds were successfully warded off by the combined efforts of Patty Lucas, Paul Zrimsek, Richard Russell, Roger Sheimo, Don Helley, and Phil Kaveny, who performed an elaborate (though boring) anti-rain dance. (And you all thought they were playing basketball!)

### SF<sup>3</sup> Gets Office

Due to the generosity of Madison Campus Ministry and Basic Choices, Inc., as of 1982 July 15, SF<sup>3</sup> has a hole-in-the-wall office at 1121 University Ave., Madison. (Mail should still be sent to the PO box.) This move allows Hank to get the fanzine library out of his office and into ours, and also helps clean out RM&L's garage. To keep things orderly and accessible, Susan Balliette has volunteered to be librarian/office manager.

### SF<sup>3</sup> Programs at Union South

These programs have been the usual blend of talking to ourselves and luring in unsuspecting mundanes off the street. New efforts at getting out press releases in a timely fashion have worked well, with the May meeting on the Mythic Origins of Heroic Fantasy (boring, huh?) the best attended meeting to date. In March we were so vegged out from WisCon no one remembers if we had a meeting or not. In April Randy Everts talked about famous SF and fantasy writers from Wisconsin. In June we held a discussion of the Hugo nominees, which should have been real short, because very few people had read any of them, but no one wanted to admit it, so the meeting was its usual two boring hours. In July we will have up-rooted ourselves sufficiently to hold a joint discussion with an even more boring Madison group, the Tolkien Society. (There is a great deal of overlap in the membership.) Part of that meeting will also be a cheap movie festival. Nothing in August, thank you. September brings the ever-unpopular Hugo winners post-mortem. And in October, Tom Jones will show slides from his work on the space telescope for the space shuttle.

### SF Book of the Month Circle

Books not-discussed over the past several months include: The Camber series by Katherine Kurtz (too boring), *Tempting Fate* by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro (too expensive), *The Sardonyx Net* by Elizabeth A. Lynn (too hard to get), and *The Third Industrial Revolution* by G. Harry Stine (too relevant). Books to be not-discussed this summer include *Molt Brother* by Jacqueline Lichtenberg, and *Dragon's Egg* by Robert L. Forward. We





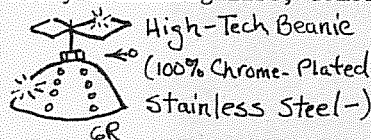
# THAT FI

Jeanne Gomoll

are considering a new policy of not-discussing only paperback originals that are not part of a series. We meet the third Thursday of each month. Call Dick, Diane, or Hank at 608+233-0326 for time and place (or write SF<sup>3</sup>).

## SF<sup>3</sup> Joins the Computer Generation

Richard Russell's home computer, which has been gathering dust and cat hair for lo, these many moons (about 36), has been removed to the safe-keeping of Cathy Gilligan's apartment, where she is spearheading a program-writing project to computerize our mailing list. Today a mailing list, tomorrow the world.



Greg Rihn

## What Fools These Mortals Be

As if we don't spend enough time industriously producing tedium in Madison, we also export the stuff. A number of folks from SF<sup>3</sup> find themselves on the ChiCon committee. Greg Rihn is head of the Media Department. Assisting him are Richard Russell, Perri West, and Diane Martin. Also, an unspecified number of SF<sup>3</sup>-ers who are also members of the Cable 4 Public Access News Team will be covering ChiCon for the Madison media scene. Roger Mudd, eat your heart out.

## Strictly Academic

[Note: In keeping with our policy to be completely serious where academia is concerned, there are no jokes in this next section.]

If you go to any of the "AcTrack" programming at ChiCon in September, you may recognize some panels and panelists that debuted at WisCon 6 this spring. "Images of the City in the Work of James Blish" stars Philip Kaveny, Jared Lobdell, and Janice Bogstad. "Writers You Probably Never Heard of" will be presented by Barbara Emrys (honorary MadSTFian), Karen Axness, and Tom Porter.

## Balliette Appointed to City Post

Boring Madison mayor Joel Skornika recently appointed Susan Balliette to the city's Program Advisory Council (PAC\*), filling the vacant public-access seat. The PAC deals with public-access television programming and protects public access in Madison. SF<sup>3</sup> Makes use of the Cable 4 access channel for its monthly Dungeons and Dragons show.

\*No relation to the video game.

## Publish or Perish

Jan Bogstad, along with Professor Fannie J. LeMoine, is preparing a correspondence course in science fiction and fantasy in an international context for the UW-Extension Liberal Studies Department. This three-credit course will be ready for students this fall. Also, look for an article by Jan in the up-coming Science Fiction Research Association *Annual Volume*, which should be available at ChiCon.

## Cox Empire Expanding

Jim Cox's bookstore, Books Upstairs, moved to new and larger quarters on June 15. And changed its name. The new name is Midwest Books. The new address is 354 E. Main St., Stoughton, WI 53589. Please note his lavish half-page ad on Page 39. (He promises to buy a full page next issue.)

## Gomoll Allowed To Be Fannish

In *Pong* Martin Morse Wooster wonders how Jeanne Gomoll was "allowed" to do something as fannish (and unboring) as re-publish Terry Carr *et al.*'s *The Cacher of the Rye* and not be drummed out of sercon Madison fandom. Well, this was a one-time-only deal and Jeanne promises never to do it again (unless she makes a profit). Besides, it was typeset. Copies of *Cacher*, which includes a long introduction by Terry Carr, explaining the famous "Carl Brandon" hoax, are available for \$7 (US) or \$7.50 (foreign). (A few copies autographed by Carr and Brandon still remain.)

## Carl and Julia Pregnant

Julia Richards and Carl Marrs are expecting their first child in August. They are also both finishing up their doctoral dissertations, which are also due in August.

## Liana Nash Update

As of 1982 April 30: mass, 8900 grams; height, 74 cm; charisma, 19.

Continued on P. 38



Diane Martin

Our Mascot  
Liana Nash



Remember all ye that existence is pure joy, that all sorrows are as shadows, they pass and are done. But there is that which remains. —Crowley



Joan Hanke-Woods

## Letters

[Write to Aurora % SF<sup>3</sup>, Box 1624, Madison, WI 53701-1624. Include your name and address on the letter itself. Unless you specify otherwise, each letter (1) is assumed to be publishable, and, if published, (2) is subject to editing, (3) will be listed under your name, and (4) will be listed under your address.]

### Doomed Homosexual Relationship

Samuel R. Delany  
184 W. 82nd St.  
New York, NY  
10024

In ["Letters" in Aurora 19], Cy Chauvin takes me to task for having been reported in *Gay Community News* as saying on the "Gay

SF" panel at NoreasCon 2 (["When It Changed",] reprinted in *Janus* 18) that Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness* is "an example of the 'doomed homosexual relationship' plot, which ends with one of the lovers dying." He goes on to explain the SF conceit controlling Le Guin's novel, i.e., that Estraven is "neither male nor female, but both", and that, therefore, "There is no way any native of Winter could have a homosexual relationship: their biology would not permit it." He goes on to say: "To directly translate any event in a science-fiction story (such as calling Estraven and Genly's friend-

ship a 'doomed homosexual relationship') into something in our own lives is a mistake in perception."

I think Chauvin has missed the point, possibly because my statement was reported indirectly. If I used the words "an example", I used them in the informal sense ("follows the structure of...") rather than the formal sense ("is a sample of..."); and the discussion context, I'm sure, would have clarified it. But also, I think there is a fundamental confusion between art and life here.

I'm sure Chauvin is familiar with the old complaint that too many space operas are simply horse operas dressed up with spaceships and ray guns.... My point was that Le Guin's story bears this kind of relation to a seemingly endless number of "gay" novels, written in the [1930s through the 1960s], that spanned the spectrum from "literature" (Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar*) to trash (something called *The Twilight Men* by some pseudonymous writer with a French *nom de plume*).... I don't know Chauvin's age or his sexual persuasion or, more to the point, his non-SF reading habits. But let me say that those of us who were gay in the '50s and who wanted to read any contemporary fiction about our own sexuality were more or



less restricted to these books; a novel whose main character was gay—even if the plot was largely about his refusing to have sex—was still considered borderline pornography and just not sold in paperback "at better bookstores everywhere". I picked up my copy of *The Twilight Men* from the same dusty rack from which I bought Philip José Farmer's *A Woman A Day*—wondering what both of them were doing there. At any rate, these stories were structurally ossified enough even then to be recognizable anywhere. And their message was pretty depressing. (By contrast, Friedkin's film *Cruising* looks like a paean to joy, life, and social acceptance.) Need one say it? This kind of relationship to a set of genre clichés is very different from the critical and ironic relation that, say, Bester's *The Stars My Destination* bears to Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

Now certainly *The Left Hand of Darkness* is no more "an example" of a doomed-homosexual-affair plot than *Bat Durstan*, *Space Ranger* is "an example" of a Western plot. But *LHoD* bears the same relation to this run of gay novels... that *Bat* bears to a certain class of hack Western. That, at any rate, was what I was trying to express on the panel, where I was quoted somewhat out of context. And when the relation is as close as this one is, the one is rendered trite just by the overriding preponderance of the other. Nor is the relation exhausted merely by Estraven's death. The entire structure of the one follows the structure of the other, from the social intrigues of Karhyde/decadent-gay-society (invariably presented in the first 25 pages), through the refusal to consummate the relationship ("No, we can't. It's just wrong, even though we may both want it."), to the bitter, remorseful end.

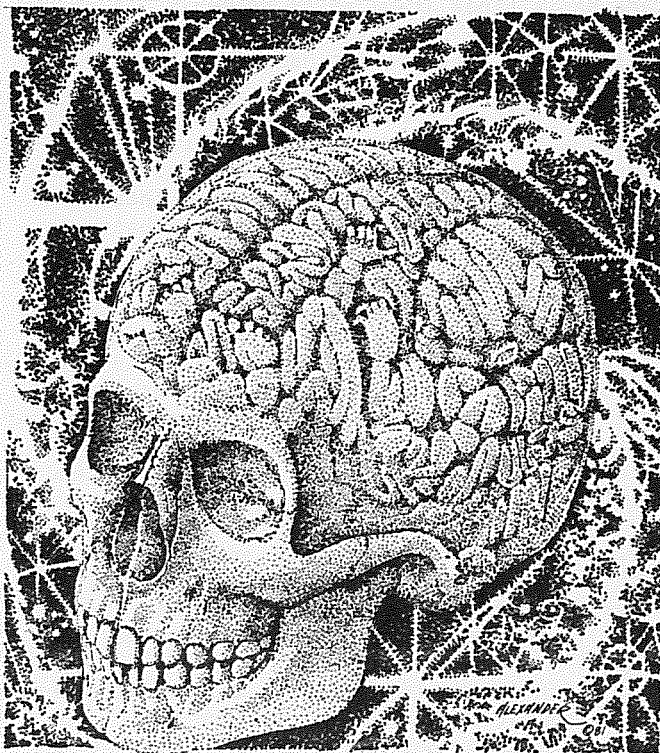
Now I have argued elsewhere (and I see the ghost of such an argument in Chauvin's citing of my own criticism in the second part of his letter) that taking *Bat Durstan* off his horse and putting him inside a spaceship actually makes some fundamental differences—or at least it opens the possibility for a good SF writer to deal with *Bat* differently. On a horse, you're outside; in a spaceship, you're inside. On a horse, there's gravity; in a small spaceship, there probably isn't. And if the SF writer will be rigorous in feeling, experiencing, and exploring the effect of his or her SF situation on the character, there is a chance to make art of those differences even if one starts out with an arguably horse-opera situation.

In order to do this, one has to go to life (not horse opera, but the textured experience of one's own everyday life) and translate it into the SF situations, restructuring them as you go.... If you follow such SF logic rigorously, even if you start out with a horse-opera situation, you can end up with SF—good SF—because the SF logic will take you away from the horse-opera structure if you let it. *LHoD*, however, begins and ends in the clichéd conventions of the gay novel of the '50s. As has been argued elsewhere and fairly exhaustive-

ly, it is precisely at the points where the SF logic of Le Guin's plot would take her into those areas that would shatter any simple and uncritical analog with such novels (e.g., the raising of children on Winter or the direct presentation of any satisfactory sexuality) that the plot shunts these topics offstage (They are referred to but never shown.), and the gay-novel plot cliché instead propels the story away from precisely where its SF interest lies.

Chauvin says, to requote: "To directly translate any event in a science-fiction story ...into something in our own lives is a mistake in perception." I absolutely agree: this is a reductive critical strategy that leaches all life from science fiction, and it certainly should be avoided. What I am saying, however, is that, during the writing of *Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin did not translate life into science fiction (which is something else entirely), in the fully rigorous and creative way the genre demands, but rather went to other art for her model—in this case to the hugely shared atrocities of what is largely bad art. (When such novels have exhibited some esthetic interest—and occasionally they have—it is by subverting or destabilizing the inevitability of the clichés.)

As I have said, I think [Le Guin's] appropriation [of the gay-novel plot cliché] was uncritical and almost certainly unintentional. Usually a writer makes such uncritical appropriations simply because, at certain points in the writing, it just "feels like a good story" to contour events in a particular way. And there is no concerted intellectual probing into where these particular story conventions and contours come from. The esthetic urge to do something



John Alexander



different and new at this particular level is absent. Usually the writer is simply interested in other things—and frequently is unaware that the particular level is there to be dealt with! There is no crime in this, political or otherwise. I feel that strongly and cannot say it too frequently. It is still, however, an esthetic failing.

When I am removed from the polemical situation of a panel discussing specifically the politics of art, all I'm really prepared to say about it is that this particular limited—and limiting—aspect of Le Guin's book is just not one that contributes to its richness—a considerable richness at that, a richness which I'm perfectly willing to admit is there, and that I have received much pleasure from. But an esthetic flaw, while it is not a crime, should not be taken as a mark of political astuteness and human insight. That does no good anywhere, either to Le Guin or the SF genre. And when I make such a point, I just hope it can be recognized for what it is and not misread as a condemnation either of Le Guin's considerable writing artistry or her extraordinary personal humanity, which her writing certainly reflects.

### Keeping Up with Jones

Suzette Haden Elgin  
Route 4 Box 192-E  
Huntsville, AR  
72740

I want to let  
Maureen P. Leshendok know  
that I appreciate her  
note on the translation  
of Tibetan poems ["Let-

ters", *Aurora* 20]. The format that she describes for the book—one line of the original language, morpheme-by-morpheme literal translation just beneath that, and free translation on the bottom—is the one required for all translations in linguistics. (For example, my doctoral dissertation on Navajo, which has a number of poems and short prose items as an appendix, is set up that way.) In order to avoid confusion for the reader, the linguist matches it up by dividing the morphemes with hyphens so that you can see that the little chunk "-n-" in the original-language word means "happened-in-the-recent-past-repeatedly-in-a-nonrandom-manner-according-to-tradition" or whatever. The reason there are rarely divisions like that in Sino-Tibetan languages is because they run so strongly to words that are not divisible into smaller meaningful pieces. (English is like that, too; English is very like Chinese. You can't take words like "house", "cup", "baby", "child", etc. and divide them into smaller pieces that have meanings of their own.) The middle line in a translation of this kind (called "trilineal" translation) is done all in capital letters, with the top and bottom lines in lower case, again for the reader's convenience. Translations of this kind exist for the poetry of many, many languages; you just have to look for them in the linguistics and anthropology journals, rather than in the literature where you might otherwise have expected them to be found.

The letter from Jessica Amanda Salmonson, with comment by Diane Martin [also in *Aurora* 20], contained what has to be the finest compli-

ment I've ever received on my work. Salmonson was noting that it is the women in my Coyote Jones series that are memorable, not the "hero" Coyote Jones, and she reports talking to someone who remembered the plot of a Coyote Jones book but hadn't remembered that there was a man in it. Diane Martin says she remembered Coyote as a woman. And Salmonson wonders if I structured my books in that way because of the difficulty of selling SF books with strong female characters until very recently. Maybe I can clarify some of this, as well as explain why I am so complimented—and honored, in fact—by these comments.

First, the Coyote Jones books represent an attempt to portray a society in which the entire "romantic love" ethic has disappeared and has been gone for so many hundreds of years that nobody even remembers what it was like to have to deal with the nasty thing. I had to try to visualize what both women and men in such a culture would be like, free of all the artificial constraints the Romeo-Juliet syndrome places upon our society today. I've always known I didn't succeed; I'm not sure it's possible to imagine such a thing from our vantage point. But the fact that Coyote comes across essentially as neither "male" nor "female" is at least a clue that I may have taken some small step toward my goal.

Second, I tried to make Coyote as neutral as possible, because his function in the books is really to serve as foil for the female protagonists. I didn't do this with the question of sales in mind, because I didn't know there was any difficulty about selling SF books with female protagonists! I did it because that was the way I wanted to write. Coyote was to be an ongoing character in a series, and if he had had to be the real protagonist in every one of them I would have had much less freedom in the kind of stories I could put him in. On the other hand, he couldn't just be cardboard, because that's boring. I tried for a compromise, and your comments are the first to really let me know that I managed after a fashion to get my point across.

Finally, considering the focus of your magazine, you might find the following interesting. From the very first Coyote Jones book, I have had men back me into corners at SF conferences (and similar gatherings) and demand that I tell them who the man was who wrote the sex scenes in my books. These males contended, most belligerently, that no woman could possibly write sex scenes from the male point of view as I had done for Coyote, and that they had to have been written by a male. (Never mind that men have been writing such scenes from a woman's point of view since there were books.) My denials have made no impression on them at all, so far as I could tell. One class using my books worked out for themselves that Harlan Ellison had written all of them, based on the observations that (1) they didn't sound like "the way a woman writes" and (2) his initials are HE and mine are SHE. I'm sure Harlan would find that idea as awful as I do, but the students were absolutely serious. On the other



hand, we have Ted White reviewing *Furthest* and telling us that my allegedly male sex scenes were so completely unlike what males really feel that he lost his temper and threw my book at his cat. I've always wanted to discuss that with Mr. White but have never had the pleasure. For the record, the only person who wrote anything in my books, even to the smallest morpheme in the smallest word, was me. (If Harlan had done it, I'd be rich and award-bedecked, instead of as I am.)

### Past Human Evolution

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Misconceptions  
about prehistory are  
legion among laypeople.  
It happened to [Jean]  
Auel herself. She re-

lated to me how to her horror she discovered a dinosaur on the galley of the dust jacket painting for [*The Clan of the Cave Bear*, reviewed in *Aurora* 20 by Debbie Notkin]. When she howled to have it removed, Bantam replied, "But that's not a dinosaur, that's a brontosaurus." Auel herself is not immune. I agree with Debbie Notkin's assessment of the book. Cultural reconstruction in archeology is a disciplinary dead end based on the logical fallacy that equates rocks and dirt with fossilized ethnography. Reconstructing a prehistoric culture is as spurious an enterprise as concluding someone's shoe size from his or her eye color. Academic credentials create no immunity from this logical trap. Bjorn Kurten, an acknowledged world expert on the Pleistocene Era, recently published *Dance of the Tiger*, which is a view of the Neanderthals even more farcical than Auel's.

The fact that it is impossible even for professional anthropologists to entirely disassociate themselves from their own cultural context further drives home the fact that cultural reconstruction is to the discipline of archeology what thalidomide babies are to the pharmaceutical industry. It haunts us long after we have abandoned it by inspiring popular literature that the general public accepts as having legitimate scientific foundation. Auel does anthropology a disservice by failing to preface her work with a statement that it is pure speculation, informed or otherwise. No matter how well researched such a book can be, the ideas expressed are wholly those of the author. In the absence of historic documentation, the dead are forever silent.

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I was displeased  
with Debbie Notkin's  
review of Jean Auel's  
*Clan of the Cave Bear*.

For a number of reasons, I feel that her review does a disservice to potential readers of the book. Notkin wrote what I consider a condescending plot summary instead of a more useful critical article or the kind of open-ended review which allows readers to make their own judgments of the book.

It is legitimate to suggest alternative ways that a book might have been written, but in so doing, I think, one must recognize the axioms according to which the author has chosen to write her book. Because Jean Auel has used the concept of race memory and collective consciousness to explore the difference between Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon does not necessarily mean that she feels that one species is superior to the other. Alya, the protagonist, is the only Cro-Magnon in the story; some of her abilities seem superior to the Neanderthals. On the other hand, the Neanderthals have other abilities that she lacks. In a sense, I think that Notkin is projecting or at least jumping to conclusions when she assumes that Auel values intelligence over feeling.

I see the function of Alya not to act as a superwoman but to define a world and a human species different from our own. By the nature of Auel's premise, we have seen a society which is trapped within the limits of the shape of its cranium. That Jean Auel can convey this premise and, for some 450 pages, present an alien that is both interesting and sympathetic is much to her credit.

A very positive aspect of this book is that it presents a prehistoric society where warfare is not the predominant feature. I find the concept that Neanderthals reached a biological dead end much more interesting than the standard assumption that they were destroyed by warfare with a "superior race". It is encouraging to think of life in a state of nature as not being inevitably nasty, brutish, mean, and short (the last premise being proven by the frequency with which Neanderthal skeletons of 50+ years of age are found).

I think Jean Auel's book is a kind of thought experiment in the best tradition of later science fiction and fantasy, an experiment which builds aliens through familiar worlds or on the basis of popular science. A more sympathetic image of Neanderthals develops than the one presented in H. G. Wells's *The Grisley Folk* some 60 years ago. We are allowed to speculate on possible evolutionary currents which have flowed into the contemporary race, that which has become *homo sapiens*.

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Moving books around  
in my library turned up  
*Daughters of Sin: The  
Sexual Tragedy of Arab  
Women* by Youssef El Masry,

copyright 1962. It is, I am sure, long out of print, but it describes a profoundly sexist society. One of the points that emerges is that older women repress the younger ones who eventually displace them. There are other points, of course. I have a 1964 essay entitled "A Leak in the Gene Pool", which I never sent off anywhere. It was based on the book and on the implicitly stated fact that Arab women with spirit and strength of character—militancy, if you will—are less successful in reproduction. Over a period of time, say a few hundred generations,... Arab character will shift to become passive, fatalistic, and generally incompetent.

Because passivity and fatalism in women insured that they would produce more children, while competence did just the opposite. Maybe it already has. Evolution strikes again....

[Is passivity heritable? Or competence? And, if so, why is it these traits of only the female half of a society which are determinative? —Richard S. Russell]

Baboons. I fear you [Patty Lucas, in "Evo-Systems" in *Aurora* 20] do them an injustice. The baboon pack typically has four or five dominant males, usually of the same age, leading and shepherding the females and juveniles. The young males are the scouts and outriders, in the exposed and dangerous position of being the first to run into anything. The dominant males are mutually supportive and serve as a strategic reserve. Not many leopards would care to stand as they came up in a group. One reason such an arrangement persists is that it ensures survival of the group.

As for the remark, "It is difficult to think of any good reason for the natural evolution of monogamous pair-bonding.", one hardly knows what to make of it. Obviously, a child will have a better chance of survival with two parents than with only one. Equally, the best incentive the female can offer the male to stick around and help raise the children is the assurance that they are his. Even in a matrilineal clan. After all, when times are tough, all those aunts and cousins...are going to be looking after their own kids first....

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...I wish [Suzette Haden Elgin, in "Teach Yourself Alien" in *Aurora* 19] had gone into more detail as to why she thinks that tele-

pathic sharing of an alien's perceptions would cause "instantaneous burn-out". I can see where it would be very confusing and disorienting, but wouldn't it be more likely to be a "shortout" when the input became too much or too weird to handle (much as macho males' circuit breakers just seem to kick out when an articulate feminist comes on heavy with a lot of facts they've ignored or mashed into their perceptive network previously)?... I also wonder if Elgin's "gradual desensitization, much like that we are acquiring to violence and sex in the movies and television" would be a desirable end, since I see nothing but bad coming from the latter—the Kitty Genovese syndrome, for example....

The article by Patty Lucas ["Evo-Systems"] intrigued me the most in [*Aurora* 20]. One small quibble about "we are the species that made it to the top". I'm more inclined to go with Konrad Lorenz's epigram: "The missing link between human and animal is man." But the thought that it is "more pertinent to draw parallels between humans and gorillas or chimpanzees" than baboons gives me the courage to at last go public with Crazy Art's Theory of Evolution [hereinafter "CATE"].

CATE came about from looking at Jane Goodall's work with chimps, the Harvard Peabody Museum film on baboon behavior, some ideas from

Aldous Huxley's *Island* and *Brave New World Revisited*, and one of St. Ursula's elegant throw-aways in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. (Incidentally, I'm not being sarcastic with "St."; I really do worship her.) Goodall showed the essential difference between baboons and chimps in their approach to one of their favorite foods, termites. The baboons use a bearlike scraping-and-licking approach, but the chimps use a tool. They stick a straw down the hole, wait until a good mouthful has accumulated, then slurp 'em up in one swell foop. What accounts for the difference? CATE thinks that the baboons' much greater commitment to ground dwelling and consequent dependency on herd behavior to protect them from large predators put a stop to individualistic "fooling around"/experimental behavior, which the chimps could afford to continue over a long period from the greater safety of the trees. The Peabody film shows baboons responding to a lion like a well organized military outfit.

So where do we come in? A lifetime of people-watching has led me to wonder if, instead of a separate branch of the primate tree, we might not be a hybrid species that somehow got past the sterility problem of the mule and others. One time on the beach at Waikiki (yes, right in front of the Moana Hotel), I saw two old Jewish ladies sitting there cleaning each other's teeth for all the world like a couple of Jane's chimps. I wanted to photograph them, but my first wife was utterly shocked and wouldn't let me. I tried to explain the scientific interest such a slide would have, but she thought I was just being nasty and it was just too awful.\*

So all of us are some combination of baboon and chimp. Baboon-people like to go to football games, jump up and down, and scream in unison about nothing—just to stay in practice in case a lion comes. Baboon-people love parades and rallies where they can whip themselves into a frenzy and get ready for war. ("Don't just sit there; do something.") If they can't find a fight to watch, they'll start one. But bloody noses and black eyes aren't so much fun on the receiving end, so they invented the so-called sport of boxing. Then there were the two guys having a nice fight and a hockey game broke out.

Chimp-people, on the other hand, would rather sit and fiddle with Rubik's cube, whether it leads to something to eat or not. They aren't too crazy about crowds or associating even with other chimp-people, but when they do they will often cooperate in building something or putting out a fanzine.

St. Ursula says that women are like animals and men are like ants, in that ants are mobilizable and animals aren't. That's oversimplifying, of course, which I think she'd be the first to admit, but there's a basic truth in there somewhere, as in Huxley's discussion

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\*One of those unfortunate marriages where the female is heavy on the baboon side, and the male is heavy chimp.



of sheep-people and cat-people. "Truth is a matter of the imagination." (Le Guin again.)

So maybe baboon and chimp genes are sex-linked. Casual observation, with the cultural factor filtered out, would lead one to think so. But not all males are 100% baboons, nor all females 100% chimps. However, Crazy Art thinks there's a definite trend but can't think of a way to prove it. Maybe some of you scientific types can. I diffidently mentioned my theory to some of my colleagues in the biology department, expecting howls of derision. I was surprised when they took me seriously. They didn't hail me as a new Darwin or anything, but allowed there might be something to it.

Goodall's male chimps have been observed to queue up for a female in estrus like so many johns at a whorehouse. I'm not suggesting that this is the pinnacle of human behavior, but at least it's a step above the baboon approach ("Gimme some lovin' or I'll slug ya!" or, not far removed, "I brought you the flowers and candy, now come across!"). Then there are the males who seem to think that a marriage certificate is a fucking license.

So it seems that sexism is not a discrete phenomenon, but one facet of the age-old struggle between the forces of individualism and freedom on the one hand and Huxley's "herd-poison" and slavery on the other. In *The Time Machine*, H. G. Wells says, "It grieved me to see what the promise of humanity had come to, but, even though it were so, it behooves us to live as though it were not so."

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Patty Lucas's  
"Evo-Systems" starts  
off well with a good  
solid explanation of  
how the sexual division  
of labor evolved—be-

cause women had to gestate and breast-feed young children (or else the species wouldn't have survived), their mobility was restricted; therefore "the chase", that strenuous and sometimes hazardous pursuit of largish chunks of high-class protein, was left to the more expendable men, while women and children garnered the more reliable food sources of vegetation and small game. This basic subsistence pattern persisted through the hominid and hunter-gatherer epochs of human life, but, with the invention of agriculture (that sophisticated variant of veggie gathering which not only permits but requires settled residence near the fields being tilled), the job of hunting became less and less essential to subsistence, though skill in hunting appears to have continued to confer prestige. Deprived of their traditional job (which, once it became a pastime, seems to have been increasingly monopolized by the upper-class males), men were free to adopt other, more specialized tasks; the elaboration of the division of labor among males formed the basis of civilized social superstructures, prominent among which is our contemporary class system. Women's work, however, continued along traditional lines: childrearing remained an essential, and essentially labor-intensive, task.

Lucas's argument runs off the rails when she asserts that, with the advent of civilization and its proliferation of job specializations, there "was probably an initial power-struggle between the sexes over the new jobs and knowledge. Men, by virtue of their physical strength, won." A better explanation is implicit in Lucas's own preceding arguments: childbearing remained an essential activity, absorbing women's energies and restricting them to relatively safe household enclosures. This state of affairs lasted until sometime last century, when it became apparent that the human population was approaching saturation level and that continued breeding without restraint would endanger the species. As a consequence, for the first time in our evolutionary history, the traditional woman's job has become obsolete, thus freeing women to join men in performing the variety of other tasks required to maintain society. Lucas's argument in terms of biologically dictated jobs, followed through to the present, provides not only a historical justification for why women have generally confined their activities to the home but also shows why this traditional division of labor is no longer justifiable. Supersession of the biological imperative to breed logically entails abandonment of the apparatus of attitudes which formerly functioned as a barrier against women's participation in other tasks.

The biological argument is logical enough, but, however valid its logic may be, it's not an adequate explanation of the divided structure of the society we've inherited. One of the dangers in considering the sexual division of labor is to accept the conventional view that we've inherited a man's world, in which men have hogged the enviable tasks, leaving women to languish in their kitchens. This ignores two things: the first, that women have always worked, as often heavy labor in the fields as cushy housekeeping; the second, that men and women have always entered into closer alliances with each other than with co-members of their own sex, and have worked together for the benefit of their mutual offspring, quite happily oppressing other men and women and children for their own advantage.

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Jan Bogstad  
["Beyond *Childhood's*  
*End*" in *Aurora* 20]  
mentions an exten-

sive list of writers and works dealing with changes in the nature of *homo sapiens* without once mentioning Brian M. Stableford.... In his first two novels, *Cradle of the Sun* and *The Blind Worm*, Stableford speculates on continued evolution in the far future—changed forms and natures of humanity and other intelligent species. His Daedalus series of novels deals with...human response to changed environment, but also with the frequent question, "Are these changed people still 'human'?" His novel *The Realms of Tantalus* explores the evolutionary forces of a global cellar/waste dump and is probably the best work showing evolution as an ongoing process to appear. But

### **The Prince of Morning Bells**

By Nancy Kress  
Timescape Books, 1981

### **Canopus in Argos Archives IV: The Making of the Representative from Planet 8**

By Doris Lessing  
Alfred Knopf Co., 1982

### **Easy Travel to Other Planets**

By Ted Mooney  
Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1981

### **Radix**

By A. A. Attanasio  
William Morrow & Co., 1981

### **Natural Settings**

By Keith Cohen  
Full Court Press, 1982

### **Little, Big**

By John Crowley  
Bantam Books, 1981

### **Riddley Walker**

By Russell Hoban  
Summit Books, 1980

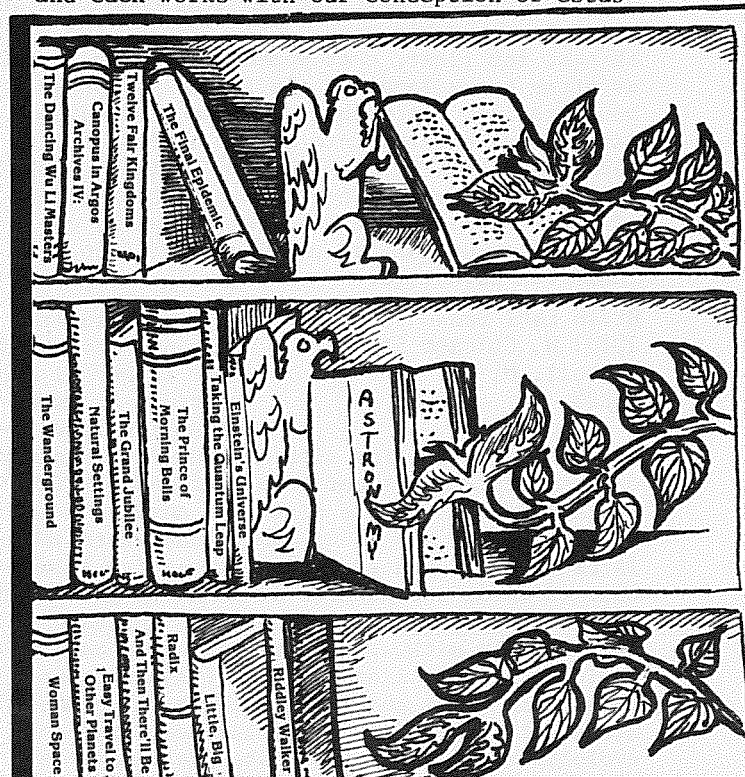
## **Jan Bogstad**

For the past several months I have been treating myself to the list of unusual works of fiction listed above. Of those seven, four are first novels, two are perhaps neither science fiction nor fantasy, two or three are definitely fantasy, and two are definitely science fiction (by most definitions of these two genres). Several represent breaks on the authors' parts with their own established patterns of fiction writing, being either forays into the writing of SF and fantasy or steps outside of it. They are all linked by a common potential for bearing the label of experimental fiction—fiction that focuses on the way that language conveys meaning at the same time that it creates a narrative reality for its readers at varying levels of distance from the reality of our experience. Each book approaches in surprisingly similar ways the widening of perceptual horizons in a reader, and each works with our conception of estab-

lished genres in order to get and maintain, with varying degrees of success, our attention. Since the texts, as examples of language-play, are working with similar problems of narrative discourse, I think it is appropriate to consider them together.

Within the extended critical community, the works by Hoban, Attanasio, and Crowley have received to date the greater body of written attention. Attanasio because his is both a first novel and a substantial, unusual work, and Crowley and Hoban because, while they have each written several previous works, these particular ones are very different. It will be argued here that the other works listed deserve some of that attention and will perhaps receive it in the near future.

Much has been made of the language in Hoban's post-holocaust first-person narrative. Certainly this is the most startling aspect of *Riddley Walker*, which is in many ways a conventional post-holocaust adventure carrying through themes found in Crowley's *Engine Summer* (the rebuilding of civilization along the lines of a new folklore and mythology), Harlan Ellison's "A Boy and His Dog" (the nasty, brutish, mean, and short life after the bomb), and a host of other such works (Vonda McIntyre, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, etc.). Certainly, this use of slang to intensify the narrative impact of a character's story is not new with Hoban; take Ellison's "The Bentfin Boomer Boys in Little Old New Alabama". What is startling about Hoban's usage is the way that it constantly causes the reader to re-evaluate the meaning of contemporary clichés by refracting the phrases through changes in time and social context. Like the character in Samuel R. Delany's "The Ballad of Beta-Two", Hoban's Riddley Walker must learn how to read the language that is his only link with a golden past that is our present. His process of discovery is our own. For example, "living on burrow time" and "roaling a fools pair of dice" are more alive as images for us than the original clichés from which they borrow. Much of *Riddley Walker* takes its significance only in relation to what we as readers know before the character discovers it. This applies to major plot elements such as his discovery of the meaning of "The Littel Shyning man" and the "1 big 1". It also applies to his manipulation of language riddles, such as the many permutations of "the hart of the wood [wud]" which finally becomes "the hart of wanting to be" (P. 165). In the last analysis, I think that we will find Hoban's character to be the most engaging aspect of his narrative. Though his mangling of English first catches the attention, it is his character's exegesis based on riddles, tra-



Linda Leach



ditions, stories, and experiences that delights.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said without reservations about the character in or the structure of Attanasio's *Radix*. Having read several positive reviews and overheard many recommendations of *Radix*, I approached it with much anticipation. The plot is tantalizingly complex. In fact, it gets away from the author at several key points. The myriad of characters, societies, and calamities inevitably resolve themselves in a classically science-fictional *deus ex machina*. The protagonist, an ever changeable and oft bemused (Here he resembles Riddley Walker.) Sumner Kagan reminds me of the superwoman in Celia Holland's *Floating Worlds*. Though I admired both characters for their unbelievable abilities and enjoyed both novels for their cosmic scope, *Radix* contained expository lumps of pseudo-philosophy which intruded into a fast-paced adventure story. I would like to say that I did not understand *Radix*, that it was too subtle for my taste, but I am fairly sure that this is not the case. Sumner Kagan was always at the right place at the right time. At least Attanasio had the good sense to attribute this to the intervention of some superior manipulative force, since it was so unacceptable otherwise. This story of how one demon-inhabited man copes with a cosmic catastrophe in order that the human race may survive should be rated a noble attempt, not "the great experimental SF novel of the '80s", as the blurb on the back cover claims.

*Easy Travel to Other Planets* is also a first novel. It is, however, much shorter and conceived on a much less cosmic scale than *Radix*; it also has received much less critical attention. *Easy Travel* is tightly written, presenting a time just a little in advance of our own, where the world hovers on the brink of nuclear catastrophe. The theme of *Easy Travel* is communication vs. information. The plot involves an experimental attempt at dolphin/human communication which posits the necessity of similar contexts in order for that communication to take place. Although conducted on a personal scale (World affairs are significant but they are not the meat of this novel and none of the protagonists is in the position to affect them.), the work is full of insights extrapolating from our contemporary tensions. The most enticing of these is the concept of "information sickness", a form of insanity brought on by a surfeit of available information which cannot be properly evaluated by the sufferer. Another is the positing of "a new kind of feeling" available to children and some of their elders but not to others. Perhaps this work is more satisfying because the inevitable inconsistencies of a first novel are much less jarring in one

painted with a smaller brush: *Easy Travel* is a little over half the size of *Radix*.

Much smaller in pages and again more personal than any of the works mentioned above is Keith Cohen's *Natural Settings*. In an article on science fiction and fantasy works, this one is perhaps out of place. Seventy-six pages of tightly written language, *Natural Settings* is a delight to read because the plot is so clearly articulated with a few strokes, while the story becomes a play with the reader's time-sense in a technique reminiscent of such authors as the Spanish South-American novelist Puig or the French Robbe-Grillet. *Natural Settings* could take place during any winter within a 10 year radius of the present. It is set in a cottage recreational community near Cape Cod. It is more mystery thriller than SF or fantasy, focusing on two significant events—a double murder and the overturning of a bus. The first of these is the major concern of characters presented in the novel, and the second is slowly cast as a possible alibi for the first. In any case, this short work presents a refreshing contrast to *Radix* because it makes use of some similar experimental techniques with a great deal more facility, forcing the reader to concentrate on the nature of reading while attempting to reconstruct, along with a character, the meaning of events. One becomes more aware of the importance of context and perspective in evaluating any piece of information, a thematic link that *Natural Settings* shares with *Easy Travel*. I recommend this as a successful example of techniques which other authors mentioned in this article are trying to translate into a science fiction or fantasy narrative.

The compound ordinarily known as water is made up of hydrogen and oxygen. As matter, it exists in three different forms, depending on temperature, each form being relatively common in its manifestation.

*Natural Settings* ends with this reflection on the nature of water—the water, the ice, the snow of a pond where a human drama unfolds. It could have easily been a part of Doris Lessing's most recent novel from the Canopus in Argos: Archives. Book four of this five-book work describes the gradual annihilation, through the onset of a glacial period, of the entire population of Planet 8. For those familiar with the series, this will be significant as one of the experimental societies created and nurtured by a superior intergalactic race involved in a fight between what I shall call, for lack of a better phrase, good and evil. Although all the Archives are linked through the activities of this master (or spiritually motivated) race, Lessing notes in an extensive postface to this short work that books three and four

R E V I E W S

are more closely linked to each other than they are to the other two.

*The Making of the Representative from Planet 8* is very subdued in tone, creating its own kind of denseness through a sameness of language which is as unrelenting as the snow and ice destroying the representative's home. As with her other works in this series, Lessing is creating in this one a metaphor with political and social overtones. This one, however, is less successful on its own, whether read as science fiction or as fantasy.

The convoluted and homogenous form of expression which follows the main character through his gradual releasing of all bodily responsibilities and identity makes *The Making of the Representative from Planet 8* more a fantasy allegory than a science fiction story, though it is still difficult to classify exactly. Two other works labelled fantasy are similarly problematical, but nonetheless exemplary as literary works, for all of their pushing at the boundaries of generic classification. These are Nancy Kress's first novel, *The Prince of Morning Bells*, and John Crowley's atypical work, *Little, Big*, which preserves the wit and craft of his earlier published works while putting these skills to more exacting use. In both cases, we have works with science-fictional elements, with focus on scientific principles or post-holocaust settings, and with use of allegory to deal with the limitations of science, and characters who hover between a fantastic and a realistic setting. Realistic is a more accurate description of *Little, Big* than of *The Prince of Morning Bells*, which turns around a classical quest theme with a female quester. (This time it is the heart of the world, not the hart of the wood, that is being sought after.)

*Prince of Morning Bells* is set in a classical fantasy work with a king, a queen, and a princess on the brink of marriage. This princess, however, is a more willful girl than usual. She insists on setting out on her own:

One Spring Day, after a strenuous hunt during which Kirila rode as if pursued by the dragon and not the other way around, causing all her ladies to fall off their mounts trying to keep up with her, she clattered up the stone stairs to the top of the highest tower, her riding boots purposefully striking only every other step. Here was the Wizard's deep shadowed lair...

"I want to go on a Quest!" Kirila blurted breathlessly.... "Yes!" Just listen, Wizard—I've got it all thought out. Even a crown princess hasn't got very much to do around here that's really important—you know that's true!" she asserted, although he hadn't tried to deny it. She knelt on the floor by his chair, her hands restless and excited on the carved wooden arm. "I want to go on a Quest to discover the Heart of the World!"

By this early point in the narrative, we are alerted to the fact that this is no normal fairy tale princess and perhaps no normal fairy tale. Indeed, the series of adventures

to which the princess subjects herself serves as well for metaphorical reflections on science, courage, logic, and many other abstract values that permeate our intellectual, scientific, and social communities. My favorite of these is her extended sojourn among a colony of monks. The colony is divided into four clans or "flavors" which are called "up, down, strange or charmed" and it appears that Kirila's function among them is both to acquire and to explode their system of classifying knowledge—an interesting reflection on the current ordered chaos of quantum physics. At the same time, like the quests of old, Kirila's is a journey toward self knowledge. The discovery of the heart of the world does not represent an end to the quest so much as a form which will give it direction.

I won't demean this work by calling it a science fantasy. It is rather a use of fairy tale and fantasy themes for the purpose of illustrating the alternative methods one might follow in acquiring self-knowledge through knowledge of the world. In this sense, it is more realistic than *Little, Big* for which the existence of myriad fairy-worlds which interpenetrate our own is an essential plot-element.

While *The Prince of Morning Bells* follows many traditional fairy-tale forms, Crowley's much longer novel *Little Big* pushes at the borders of realistic and fantasy fiction by slipping back and forth between the two. One could easily say that it covers a timespan of the late 19th through the end of the 20th Century, that it is set in the city of New York and its near environs, and that it describes a world moving towards the social dissolution which we all predict for our near future. This would be to exclude the important presence of fairy folk and unexplained phenomena which are part of the reality of some of the characters—but mystifying to others. As with several of the books mentioned above, characterization is the strong point of *Little, Big*, but the characters are all slightly outside the realm of our usual definition of sanity. Some are totally outside of it. Others are defined by their incessant quest to verify the queerness they sense around themselves.

The majority of *Little, Big's* pages are devoted to the description of a complicated and atypical extended family which was begun in the late 19th Century with the Reverend Theodore Burne Bramble, through his daughter Violet Bramble and her much older husband, the architect John Drinkwater. Through these characters, the entire queer clan is created. It engulfs the unsuspecting protagonist, a quiet telephone book corrector, Smoky Barnable, in no less than the battle between the fairy and the human worlds. Though one can interpret it as such, this is not parallel to Lessing's battle between an abstract "good" and "evil", as much as between two ways of organizing the world, ours and something

Continued on P. 24



## **Woman Space: Future and Fantasy Stories by Women**

Ed. and published by New Victorian Press, Inc., 1981

**Cheryl Cline**

*Woman Space* is a collection of thirteen SF stories by women, including a childhood story by Joanna Russ and a short story by Josephine Saxton. It's an excellent feminist anthology, with stories that address themes important to women's lives: sexual roles, motherhood, defying authority, self-determination, and our responsibilities in a technological society.

Jennifer Malik's "Every Girl's Dream," about a young lesbian toroidal-shaped alien who wins an intergalactic beauty contest, discusses, in a light but serious manner, adolescence, lesbianism, and standards of beauty. Carole Rosenthal writes a surrealistic fantasy about sexual roles in "Cowboys"; Joanna Russ satirizes middle class mores in "Little Tales From Nature"; Josephine Saxton writes a horror story about a mother trying to keep her children from starvation in "To Market To Market"; Margaret Kingery presents a thorny post-holocaust story about the "destructive force of underlying rage" of women in "Suffering Machines"; Lois Metzger questions the normal view of sanity in "Mara"; and Celeste Newbrough presents us with an ominous warning in her short short "Dialect of the Data Disk"; and Julia Older writes of the problems of identity in "The Girl with the Cloak".

Most of the stories deal in some way with the problems of a technological society, and in those stories that treat the theme in any depth, two motifs emerge: (1) an extrapolation on present-day tendencies towards a technological dystopia and, (2) a man-technology/woman-nature split. The writers seem to be unable, to paraphrase Joanna Russ, to imagine a utopia with technology in it. In "A Miracle and Other Solutions", Carole Rosenthal satirically presents a populace helpless in the face of a technology controlled by a bureaucracy which can only deal in stop-gap solutions. The people of New York passively allow the government to place a terrarium-like dome over the city. When things start to go wrong, they react either with paranoia or with a fatalistic pragmatism, fueled by official announcements designed to alternately stir the citizens against each other and to sooth them into passivity.

In "The Devil We Know", by Eileen Kernaghan, the people of the colonized world of Amara live a hand-to-mouth existence, farming the land without the bene-

fit of machines. The matriarchal culture of Amara is a reaction against the technological disaster that destroyed Earth and sent its people into space. Their distrust of machines has gained the dark force of religion and superstition. They would rather starve (and do, in bad winters) than improve their technology past its primitive level. A male teacher sent by the "federation" meets this superstition head on when he tries to introduce high-tech tractors to Amara. The people there would rather suffer starvation and hardship—the devil they know—than try to deal with the "demons" of the machines.

A more positive, but still an "either/or" solution to technological society and technological dystopia is presented in Elaine McKay Smith's "The Turning". Here nature, in the form of a strange but beneficial plant that insinuates itself into human biology, rises out of the ruins of a civilization that has, like our own, grossly misused its technology and all but destroyed nature. In this story too, technology and civilization is connected with men, and the plant (nature) chooses a woman to begin the "turning".



John Alexander

"As women, we are just beginning to explore our ways of seeing, our point of view, our voices and forms, our creativity and our space... In this genre we can express our fears and make our preliminary explorations. Here we can express our hopes for the future as well as to search through a recreated past, or an alternate universe" - from the introduction to *Woman Space*

In only one story is men and technology and women and nature reconciled, "Without a Daughter", by Claudia Lamperti. But in order to be reconciled they had to have first been split; in this story we see only the first step towards reconciliation as a woman crosses over the boundaries of the "women's land" to claim her son. In another story, "Zero Sum Game", by Jennifer Malik, the split is not quite so obviously a man-woman one, but there is a difference between the Citizens, who win the right to rule through excellence at a sort of super-video game, and the peasants, who remain ignorant country farmers, without control over their own lives. The woman who ultimately bridges that gap works within the system, but acknowledges the games are a sham, "Children playing pretending if you dress a certain way, put your hat on backwards, do not step on a crack...you can control the world". She is able to transcend the games, defy authority; and she will be able to bring the two poles of her world together to create a society in which technology and power will be used for the benefit of all, and for the destruction of none.

Dystopia is the current model for the future, and with good reason. Women SF writers, looking at a male-dominated world on the edge of destruction, cannot envision a utopia based on male values. The culture that has brought us to the threshold of nuclear destruction and technological dystopia will not be able to provide the alternative to these problems. The values of our culture must be profoundly changed, and since it is a male-dominated technological society that has failed us, the alternative must lie in a woman-dominated, nature-oriented culture. However, as the example of Amara in "The Devil We Know" shows, there are problems with this solution as well. We cannot simply go back in time to a "simpler" pastoral existence. It is to be hoped that we can find a way to integrate a rational ecological philosophy into our technology; that we can close the nature/technology split as well as the rift between women and men.

### **Full House**

by Terry A. Garey

playing hand after hand  
of DNA poker,  
gamete talk  
whispers through the walls:  
"Your deal, stranger,"  
she says.

## **The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women**

By Sally Miller Gearhart  
Persephone Press, 1979

**Linda Frankel**

Recently, the gay magazine *Christopher Street* published an article titled "Good-bye, Sally Gearhart". Gearhart had succeeded in outraging the author and a good number of other men. Who is this woman and why is she upsetting all these people? That's Mystery One. The second mystery is what *The Wanderground* is doing in a list of books dealing with androgynous futures. [Editor's note: The theme of this issue was originally advertised as "Technology in an androgynous future" and only subsequently broadened to just "technology".]

Maybe I'm very obtuse, but I can't understand why anyone would think that a book that starts with the premise that men are so evil that Nature herself hates them, isn't sexist. John Preston, the author of the *Christopher Street* article, was distressed by Gearhart's lack of respect for gay male sexuality. He projects her attitude on to other feminists and warns that feminism is dangerous to gays. Gearhart's brand of feminism seems to me like the Worm Ouroboros consuming itself. It's dangerous to men, women, and all other living things—for the same reasons that patriarchy is dangerous. Why do we need a different set of role expectations? Why do we need stereotypes based on sex that are labeled as feminist? Female chauvinism is no improvement. If Nature would revolt against imbalance in human society, surely she would rise in anger against the hill women of Sally Gearhart.

The basic situation is that when Nature revolted, none of the machine technology which is supposedly the product of patriarchy—serving only patriarchal purposes\*—would work outside the cities. This is absurd. It wouldn't bother me so much if it were merely impossible, but it's also based on the utterly ridiculous premise that cities aren't part of the country. There's an old joke to that effect: "I'm moving back to the city. The country's at war."

And so it is in *The Wanderground*. The country's at war with machine technology and with masculinity itself. Men who venture outside the cities are impotent. The purpose of Nature in doing this is to prevent the rape of the lesbian-feminist hill women who've escaped to the country. There is a group of men—the gentles—who have also escaped the cities. Other reviews of this book have described them as gay because they live

\*This in itself a dubious idea. Machine technology has made the lives of women much easier.



separately from the hill women. Yet it seems to me that they left the city due to their dedication to feminist principles—a desire not to be part of the viciously dictatorial patriarchy that's described in the sections of the book taking place in the city. The gentles have nothing to do with the hill women only as a result of the women's paranoid attitude toward men. Naturally, the gentles resent this. I mean, consider what these men have done. They aren't gay. (Remember the original premise: men are impotent outside the city. They have no sexuality. That's supposedly what makes them "gentle". Gearhart depicts men as being so threatening that the only way a feminist society can be attained is by destroying them as men. These asexualized men are pitiable beings. Even Gearhart shows some sympathy for the poor things. They apparently don't miss the sex all that much, but they do seek intimacy, ways to connect, and self-transcendence. Gearhart concedes that the gentles are human but suggests that city men are some vile alien force outside nature.

The machine technology of the city men isn't the only technology described in *The Wanderground*. There is also the psionic technology that the hill women have developed. Thus Nature isn't opposed to all products of human culture—just machinery. From the point of view of environmentalists, psionic technology would be ideal because the sole natural resource used is the human mind. This is a wonderfully utopian idea, but even the mind has limits. It's limited to the amount of energy available to expend. If you've spent the entire community's energy on healing someone, then everyone will be too exhausted to deal with day-to-day problems. When people become the tools of technology, their minds are used and abused. Marion Zimmer Bradley deals with these problems in her Darkover novels, but Sally Gearhart doesn't seem to know they exist. Everything is hunky-dory. Nature is in flower and the hill women are in telepathic communication with her as well as each other.

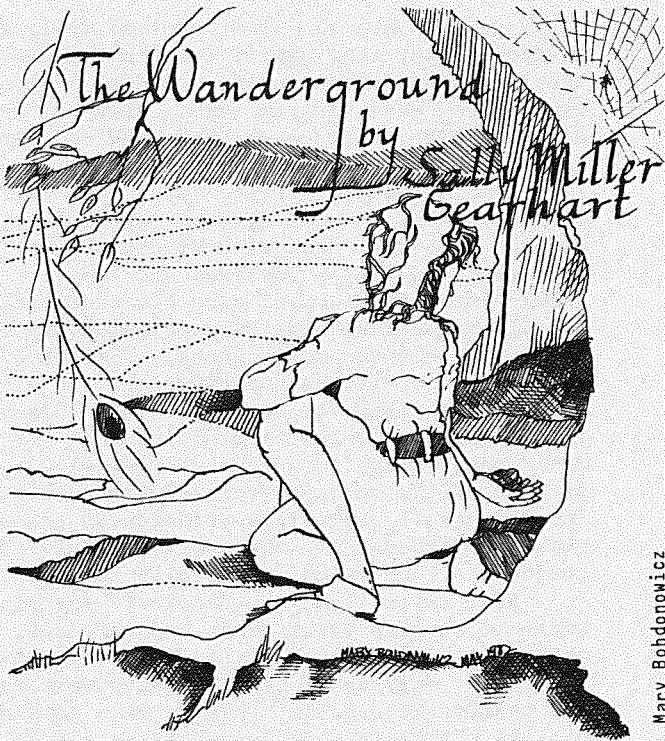
The best passages in the book are the ones that show telepathic interplay between the women and the plants and animals that surround them. Gearhart has a lovely poetic style, but she does tend to over-indulge herself at times. She's good at inventing terminology for telepathic experiences but poor in making them seem real to the reader. There is very little insight into the characters of the women. In fact, there are few characters that are at all defined. Perhaps Gearhart wished to show that the hill women are a phenomenon of Nature, like trees, having no individuality. This is a particularly bad error in a book focusing on telepaths, since the individuality of the characters must form the basis of the plot structure. Instead, we have an entire society reacting as a collective mind minimizing conflict, making the hill women seem rather dull and causing the reader to think that maybe a "feminist" society that brings about so much uniformity in women isn't very different from

patriarchy. Yes, the women control their own destinies, but they aren't free to live any other way than the path the original hill women chose when they arrived. This may be oppressive to later generations and certainly to mavericks within the current generation.

Such a society, living within the strict limitations of a human-mind-energy ecology, probably couldn't deal with diversity any more than separatist lesbians can today. "Woman-identified women" squabble over "political correctness" and play more-feminist-than-thou oneupwomanship games. These achieve nothing but divisions and bitterness in a time when so much needs to be done. Sally Gearhart, in recognizing the problem of internal divisions, attempts to resolve them all in a psychic unity, but a better solution would be for feminism to celebrate differences and give women the freedom to make a wide variety of choices, all of which are equally "correct".

Now, while it may be "correct" for hill women to develop their psychic potentials, it certainly isn't for gentles. The women believe that only women can use psi powers until the gentles reveal that they've been working to achieve psionic potency—perhaps as a substitute for the sexual potency they surrendered. At least the women see it that way, because they appear just as threatened by telepathic men as by sexual men. Men aren't to be trusted with power, say the hill women. Even the gentles will misuse it. Nevertheless, what choice do the gentles have? Humans are tool users. If they are forbidden the use of mechanical devices, they will create some technology, and the one most natural to the feminist perspective that hill women and gentles share is psionics. It creates intimacy rather than alienation. It's interesting that the psi powers of the gentles are different in kind from those of the women. This is probably sexist, because the male and female brains aren't that different. Psi talents would vary according to the individual personality—not according to sex. Despite this flaw, the development of psionic technology by the gentles was the most positive event in the book, though the hill women and perhaps Gearhart herself wouldn't think so.

*The Wanderground* seems to be more about where separatist feminists are now than about any society of the future. As an artifact representing a stage of feminist development, it's rather interesting, but as a utopia showing a direction or a goal for feminists it's a failure. An androgynous society (as opposed to a female-chauvinist one) using psi would certainly be of a great deal more positive value. Meanwhile we have Sally Gearhart holding up a mirror to show us where we are now. There's a great deal of activity in feminist spirituality that might develop along the lines suggested in *The Wanderground*, but do we want to continue separatist trends? It might be a good idea for feminists to read this book in order to raise some hard questions.



Mary Bohdonowicz

## **The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women**

By Sally Miller Gearhart  
Persephone Press, 1979

**Jeanne Gomoll**

*The Wanderground* allegorically portrays one feminist response to contemporary conflict between the sexes. And as is all science fiction, its speculation interprets the here-and-now more than it predicts the future.

For the past five years or so, many critics have been pointing to SF as a perfect vehicle for feminist invention. A quotation from Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères* aptly distills and encourages this idea: "...Remember. Or, failing that, invent." Doing just that, because society denies her the memories or hopes of a better world, the main character in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* escapes her asylum existence into a potential future in her imagination. She emerges refreshed and able to work in the real world, hopefully building the future, utopian world of her dreams. Two of Suzy McKee Charnas's books are written as allegories, also. *Walk to the End of the World* dramatically extrapolates a future from our contemporary sexist society. The sequel, *Motherlines*, describes a women's separatist response to that world. Both Piercy and Charnas use the science fiction form to invent possible solutions, to explore the possibilities available in today's world. With her novel *The Wanderground*, Sally Miller Gearhart has joined the ranks of those authors who are fictionally dealing with ideas generated from their politics.

There are problems of interpretation in this kind of science fiction, similar to the problems encountered by writers of the more

familiar "gadget" science fiction. Robert Heinlein used to protest that SF writers were not fortune tellers. He said that the frequency with which science fiction predicted future inventions was partially the result of good research and partially the result of the blind luck of a gambler who bets on all the horses at the racetrack. Similarly, writers who use SF to comment on social interaction protest the assumptions of some of their readers that any given fictional world represents the author's conception of how the world should be or will be. On the contrary, these stories are mind-games, which allow us a glimpse of our own world from a fresh angle.

There are several possibilities when thinking about the future of relationships between women and men in society. We may, for example, discover that women and men are basically the same sorts of human beings and that our role conflicts derive from different socialization processes. "All" that needs to be done to eliminate these role conflicts is to eliminate the separate socialization processes. Alternately, we may discover that there are distinct and major genetic differences between women and men, and that we are not the same sort of human beings. In that case, those differences may turn out to be so minor as to be over-shadowed by differences between people of the same sex, or they may turn out to be crucial to the balance of power and quality of communication between the sexes. No agreement on this subject has been reached, either by the scientific community, or by individual women who have nevertheless had to continue to make personal decisions regarding their own relationships with men. There have, of course, been many conflicting "politically correct" conclusions regarding the true nature of gender. So it is not surprising that women writing science fiction have attempted to test many possibilities in their fiction.

*The Wanderground's* allegorical assumption is that women and men are genetically and irreconcilably different.

...the essential fundamental knowledge [is that] women and men cannot yet, may not ever, love one another without violence; they are no longer of the same species. (p. 115)

Like Alice Sheldon's portrayal of men in her horror story, "The Screwly Solution", men are ultimately fatal to women and to this planet, because of their irrepressible urges to compete, to dominate, and to kill. Unlike the terrifying scenario in Sheldon's story, however, Gearhart's tale does not end with doomsday. Rather, in *The Wanderground*, the Earth itself rises against men and their machinery. The Earth seemingly has allied itself with women because of their non-threatening nature and has trapped men in the cities. Outside of the cities men are impotent and their machinery does not work.

Gearhart invents a science-fictional device to provide intermittent flashback information to the reader about the history of *The Wanderground's* world: All the women in the community share hypnotically-planted memories of



their fore-sisters and are forever aware of their history. This lends a feeling similar to the feminary readings of *Les Guérillères*. Flashbacks are first person and immediate, even though they are centuries old. They cover the experiences of women convicted and burned in the New Witch Trials; of women trying to evade the new laws requiring every woman to be married, to observe a curfew, and to wear dresses; and of women--during the final days of the old world--fleeing large population centers for their lives. The glimpses of these days are shocking and terrible, quite similar in emotional content to the worlds of Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World* and Sheldon's "Screwfly Solution".

After men discover their own powers restricted, women discover that they have latent powers of their own. Painfully, women learn to discard the habits of relying on traditional machine technology and practice a different psionic technology. Where machines separate people from the Earth and disrupted the ecology, the power of the women's psionic technology derives from total awareness of one's connections and participation with the Earth. And this psionic technology satisfies all of their needs.

"...We can do anything that the old machines could do. And with a good deal less effort."

"Like the glowlobes?"

"That's one thing."

"And windriding?"

"Yes. And lots more."

"Bombs and nerve gas and disease pellets?"

"Easy."

"Then why don't we do them, Rhynna?"

Rhynna laughed again. "That's the mistake the men made, sisterlove, and made over and over again. Just because it was possible they thought it had to be done. They came near to destroying the Earth--and may yet--with that notion. Most of us like to think that even long ago women could have built what's been called 'Western Civilization'; we knew how to do all of it but rejected most such ideas as unnecessary or destructive." (p. 145)

The Hill Women, the community of women on which this novel is centered, reproduce parthenogenically (another psionic power). They have little contact with men, other than to keep tabs on their city activities. The one exception is their contact with "the gentles".

An uneasy truce exists between the Hill Women and the gentles. These men, for all their abandonment of the cities and concerted effort to shed sexist attitudes and behavior, have not learned telepathy or any other psionic technology. The women fear that this indicates a basic difference between women and men in how they relate to the Earth and to nature. The central conflict of *The Wanderground* is first the rumor and then the actuality of the gentles having finally developed psionic powers. The women's fears are well founded. The gentles use their first struggling attempts at telepa-

thy as a tool for dominance, rather than for communion with each other and nature, as do the Hill Women.

"Nonviolent? Never. You know what will happen. You'll use your new power all right. You'll use it, perfect it, manufacture it, package it, sell it, and tell the world that it's clean and new because it comes from a different breed of men. But it's just another fancy prick to invade the world with. And you'll use it because you can't really communicate, you can't really love! Of course it's not an enfoldment. You couldn't enfold an ant if it crept into the middle of your hand!" (p. 179)

"I am not scorning any one of you or your discovery," she said, "or even your intent. My mistrust is of a deeper thing."

Labrys spoke. "Our maleness."

Evona nodded. (p. 180)

As an allegory, *The Wanderground* makes us look at the nature of technology and its connection to traits we label feminine and masculine. Gearhart suggests the possibility of different kinds of technology, some of which do not endanger the ecological balance but instead work in harmony with it. As long as men in *The Wanderground* ignore the connection between the city and the country they will be trapped by a world that has acted in self-defense. Gearhart suggests that technology invented and manipulated through patriarchal values must be carefully evaluated, and alternative technologies investigated.

*The Wanderground* is a beautifully written picaresque novel. Chapters consist of episodes in the lives of different women living in the Wanderground. No single main character is focussed upon; instead, the development of the community is the novel's protagonist. Gearhart, who is known primarily for her political essays and speeches (And you may recall seeing her in the film *Word is Out.*), has written an extremely interesting and innovative sortie into the field of fiction. (At least one of the chapters was published as a short story in the defunct fanzine *The Witch and the Chameleon*. Other chapters appeared originally in *Ms.*, *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly*, and *Woman-Spirit*.) Of interest are the marvelous chapter heading drawings by Elizabeth Ross. The drawings are beautifully appropriate--delicate, and yet fully textured: images of plants, feathers, woven wall-hangings, landscapes, and animals. *The Wanderground* is an excellent example of speculative feminism!

## ***The Final Epidemic***

Ed. by Ruth Adams & Susan Cullen

Educational Foundation for Nuclear Science, 1981

**Philip Kaveny**

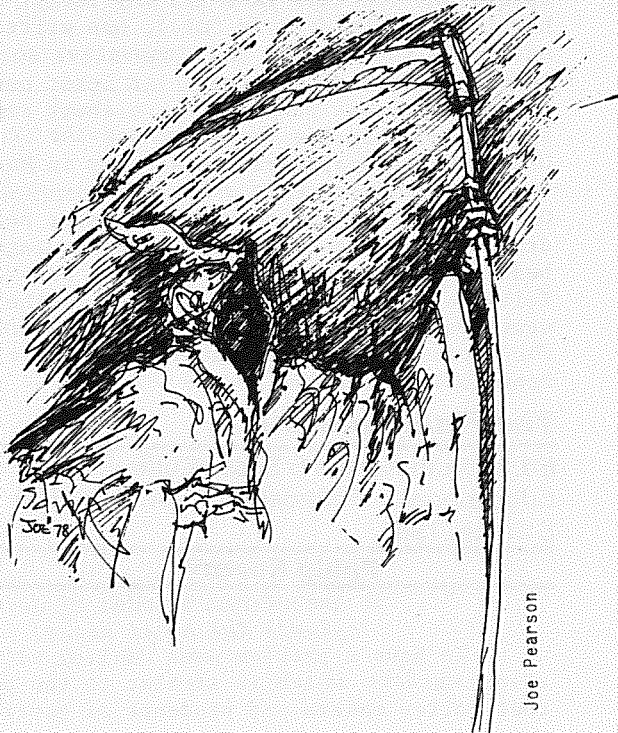
"...The unmentionable odor of death  
offends the April night..."

We have a problem when dealing with nuclear warfare which is similar to the problem that policy makers and students of government

had before the outbreak of World War I. The engines of destruction, which now seem quaint, had evolved to a level beyond the comprehension of leaders and policy makers, let alone the average person on the street. In 1914 people were thinking of wars in terms of 1814. In 1982 we are being encouraged to think of war in terms of 1918 or, at the most, 1945. This seems to me to be as much a problem of language as anything else. There simply are no words or images available to make nuclear war seem real or even possible.

Language is not adequate to convey the horror of what we are facing. We do not smell the rotting corpses even when we read Lovecraft's stories. We are always shielded from death, seeing it only in the most polite circumstances. I remember a co-worker of mine, a Vietnam veteran, telling me "Nothing stinks like a burning corpse". He drove an oil tank truck in Vietnam. But he is an exception, I, and most people, have never experienced death's smell. How could I picture 120,000 rotting corpses choking the streets of my own city? (Presuming, of course, that I survived.)

The problem in conveying what a nuclear exchange would cost is also a problem of belief. A friend of mine works as a janitor in the emergency ward of the University of Wisconsin Hospital. After the Air Florida plane crash in January, we started musing about what a plane crash would do to the emergency room capacity of all the hospitals in our area. Our thoughts I think were on the edge of bigger things. But it took another friend of mine, a medical doctor, to show us the next step. "Do you ever wonder, with all the post-holocaust talk going around, what life would really be like after a nuclear exchange? Well, I'm a member of a group—Physicians for Social Responsibility—whose job it is to tell you." She told us about her involvement in PSR.



Joe Pearson

Rather than re-iterate all the whole ensuing discussion, let me work with an image from a film, *The Final Epidemic* (produced by Stan Thierman), which was shown at WisCon 6. It showed and discussed exactly what a nuclear strike would do to our social fabric, in terms of the precise effect that nuclear war would have on public health and health care delivery systems. The film deals with the San Francisco Bay Area, but it could also apply to any major metropolitan area. A one megaton blast above my hometown would produce concentric circles of ever more horrifying death radiating from the isthmus on which Madison is located, past the suburbs, and into the rich, black countryside. The fortunate would be vaporized within the first circle. The rest would "live" longer. They would all need medical care—care that would be nonexistent because most medical facilities and personnel are situated within the first two circles. What I would suggest readers do is take a compass and draw concentric circles about their hometowns, starting with one about three miles in diameter, and spacing them about 1½ miles apart. The same circles could be drawn for Miami, Phoenix, Louisville, Boston, Denver, and Chicago—all sites for North American or World Science Fiction conventions, 1977 through 1982. Seeing is not always believing, but in this case it is a graphic first step.

Perhaps members of PSR can function as shamans or medicine women to conjure up the ever-present image of death as something real and tangible, as a public health problem for which there is no solution. One can only hope that they can dispel the malignant lie that civil defense is a possibility. That credit cards and TYME Tellers would function. That 150 million people could be moved from "targeted" to "host" areas. That mail would be re-routed. And that loved ones could actually be found after the blast. I was talking with a member of PSR and she said with a note of bitter clarity that perhaps the only thing that made sense in this macabre comedy was the stockpile of morphine which would ease the unbearable pain in the last few hours before death.

From a personal standpoint, after seeing the film, and reading a book of articles by the same name, I had recurrent dreams in which I was a nuclear burn victim. I became so depressed that I abandoned this article for almost a month. Now, because of an international movement called "Ground Zero Week", I see a groundswell of sentiment which may negate the lie that it is possible to survive a nuclear war with the cold clinical reality of what nuclear war means in human terms. My hope is that our policy makers can smell that unspeakable stench of death and realize that

*We must learn to love one another or die.*



Author's note: This article is bracketed by sentiments from W. H. Auden's poem, "September 1, 1939".



## Einstein's Universe

By Nigel Calder  
The Viking Press, 1979

Jeanne Gomoll

BBC television and the American PBS Network commissioned Nigel Calder in 1979 to help celebrate Einstein's centenary and produce a TV show that would "make relativity plain". Doing the same thing with words rather than pictures--but just as few numbers--Calder also wrote the book *Einstein's Universe*. I recommend this book for anyone who tends to close a book at the least hint of a formula or a bell curve. *Einstein's Universe* indeed "makes relativity plain".

*Einstein's Universe* reads like a novel, and I haven't experienced that with a science book since reading Isaac Asimov's *The Universe*. Calder reads like a more literate, and quite a bit more humble, Carl Sagan. Right away, he reassures you that you will understand.

I mean...to sketch Einstein's universe in an up-to-date fashion, with no apology and only a few historical asides. In the conventional, chronological approach the reader is too often lost in the boondocks of Special Relativity, confused by flashing lights and stopwatches, and barely able to glimpse the great ideas of rest-energy and Einsteinian gravity. For many years, General Relativity was regarded as too difficult and opaque for ordinary scientists, never mind the man in the street. With hindsight it seems that a generation of mathematical physicists had no vivid grasp of the theory themselves. Now all that is changed. In the era of atomic clocks and suspected black holes it is both possible and appropriate to devote the greater part of this book to Einstein's theory of gravity.

The most interesting thing about reading this book is that one emerges with an entirely different conception of the basic rules of the universe than one started out with, if one started out, as I did, with Newtonian physics as is still commonly taught in grade and high schools. I suspect that most people of my generation who did not specifically study the sciences know of the implications of Einstein's work only in a very superficial way and have never incorporated these ideas into their conception of the universe as a whole.

For example, after I'd read the book, my brother Steve (age 26) and I were talking about it, since he'd just read it as well. As we fumbled through the vocabulary of relativity, finding the concepts much more difficult to re-formulate to one another than they were to understand as we read Calder's explanations, our conversation became tremendously excited as we again rediscovered how dramatic and fantastic the ideas were. (I still feel this way about the book and intend to re-read the book until I'm a bit more comfortable with the vocabulary.)

Steve and I talked on and on about Calder's book as we drove from Madison to Milwau-



John Alexander

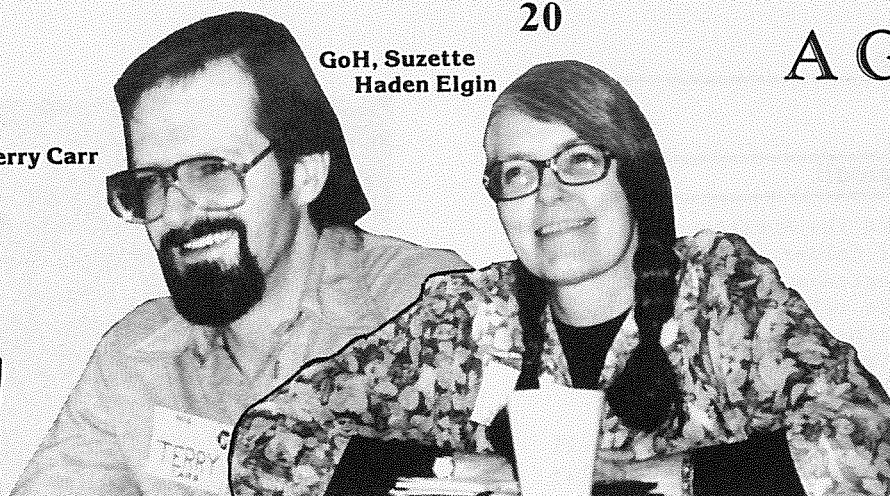
kee. In the back seat our 11-year old brother sat quietly. Concerned that our conversation was going over Danny's head, I reluctantly tried to wrap it up and change the subject by saying "I don't know if I will ever be able to change the way I assume the way the world works. I mean, an apple falls because of gravity, right? How am I going to imagine successively 'slower' shells of time?" Then, turning to Danny, I said, "Did you have a good time in Madison?"

Danny ignored that question and went on to explain to me why gravity was not an appropriate model to describe the fall of an apple. Danny had not been sitting in the back seat bored, he'd been listening attentively, and understanding the concepts more easily than either Steve or I did. Danny was learning the ideas directly and did not have to unlearn a whole pattern of wrong ideas first.

Seeing Steve glance back at him and then turn back to the wheel with a look of stunned shock on his face, and seeing me staring at him in surprise, my mouth hanging open, Danny continued his explanations. Remembering our confused comments a few moments earlier when we discussed the theory that there were worm-hole faults in the universe, he leaned forward and explained as if to a child, "It's just like that part in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*..."

The point is that the concepts are plain and understandable—especially if you can get Calder or my brother Danny to explain them to you. The hard part is throwing off the years of other assumptions. For the first time in my life, I understood why traveling faster than the speed of light is considered impossible. Calder uses the "extreme case" of a black hole to explain the mechanisms of Einstein's theory of gravity and time—and makes that explanation more thrilling than even some of the best SF I've ever read. One thing, though, don't go—as I did—to see the Disney production of *The Black Hole* soon after reading *Einstein's Universe*. To say the least, the book—in this case—is infinitely better than the movie.

GoH Terry Carr

GoH, Suzette  
Haden ElginSuzette  
and PAC-MAN

Diane Martin

## The World of Ozark



K. Jollie '81

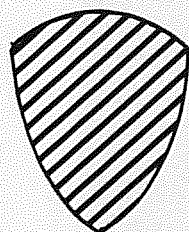


Wilderness Areas

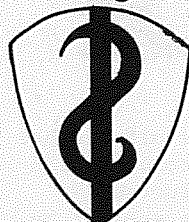
### Orthography Available

Suzette Haden Elgin's *Orthography of Formalisms & Transformations* (a one page appendix for the *Ozark Trilogy*) is available for a SASE from SF<sup>3</sup>, Box 1624, Madison, WI 53701-1624.

Map and crests © Suzette  
Haden Elgin, 1981.



Airy



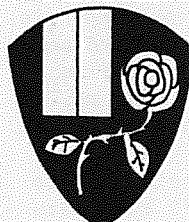
Brightwater



Clark



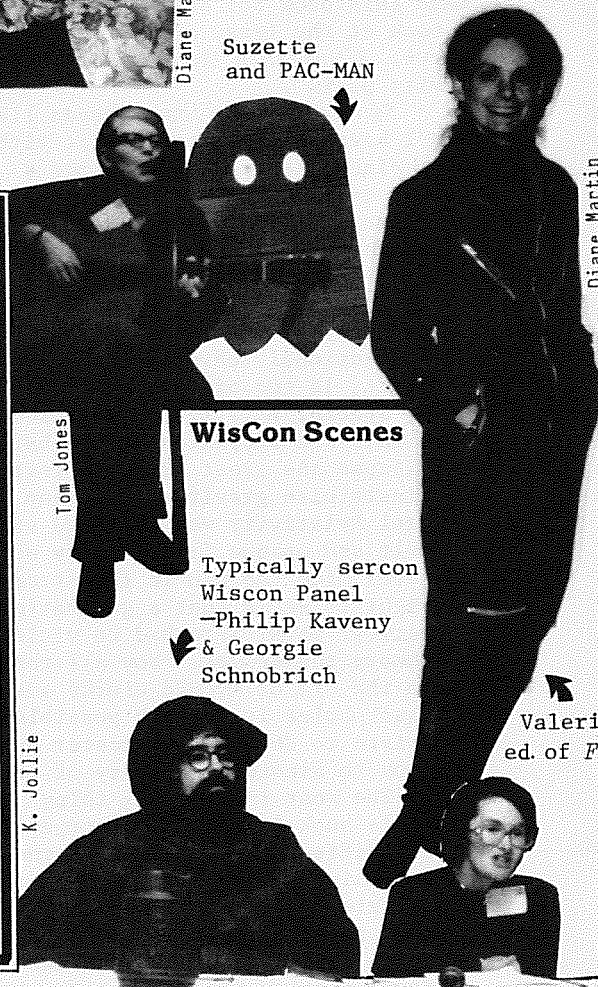
Farson



Guthrie



Lewis



### WisCon Scenes

Typically sercon  
Wiscon Panel  
-Philip Kaveny  
& Georgie  
Schnobrich

Valerie  
ed. of F

Opening ceremonies - Carrie Root, Greg Rihn, Lawrence Gold, and Karen & Randy Jones

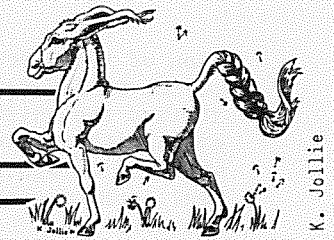




## The Ozark Trilogy

By Suzette Haden Elgin  
Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981

Debra Schroeder



"Men are of but two kinds. Splendid and pitiful. The splendid ones are rare, and if you chance on one, you'll know it. What I tell you now has to do with the rest of 'em..."

Granny Hazelbide,  
*The Grand Jubilee*

Suzette Haden Elgin, guest of honor at this year's WisCon, is a linguist, science fiction author, professor, and musician. She is also a native of the Ozark Mountain region and she chose that background and culture as a base for her fantasy, *The Ozark Trilogy*.

The planet Ozark was settled by the Twelve Families—a group of people from the Ozark Mountains of North America who got fed up with all of the disgusting things happening on Earth in the early 21st Century, took The Ship, and set off to find a new homeworld. They landed on a planet in a universe with other allied planets known as the Garnet Ring; the Twelve Families set up Twelve Kingdoms and eventually formed a Confederation of Ozark Kingdoms. Although there has as yet been no alliance with the other planets of the Garnet Ring, the Ring has had an eye on Ozark for some time and is looking at the possibility of a takeover.

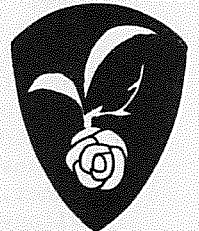
Magic works in the Ozark universe. The planets of the Garnet Ring base their cultures on magic rather than technology and they are always interested in adding more magic-using worlds to their group. On Ozark there are three levels of magic practitioners: the Grannies who deal with Granny Magic—healing, Naming of girl babies, household and garden affairs, etc.; Magicians, who are typically male professionals and who work primarily with individuals or small groups; and (male) Magicians of Rank who use their powers on efforts concerning the whole planet, such as weather and keeping the mules flying. And then there's Responsible of Brightwater, the latest of a series of Responsibles (There must be one Responsible in every generation.) who has magical abilities not found in the usual female and who, it turns out, is responsible for a lot more than the Magicians of Rank ever guessed.

In *Twelve Fair Kingdoms* the routine magic of the planet has gone slightly haywire—the mules begin to fly erratically and the milk sours, for example. Responsible of Brightwater suspects that some disgruntled soul is hoping to mess up the fast-approaching Grand Jubilee in celebra-

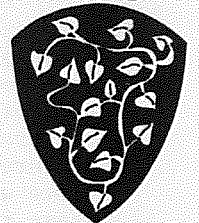
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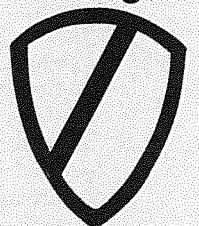
McDaniels



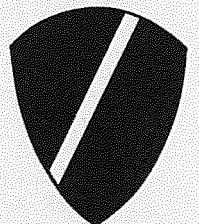
Motley



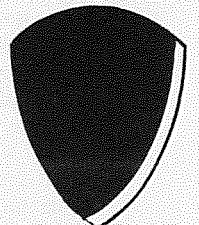
Purdy



Smith



Traveller



Wommack

Jeanne Gonnell



Georgie Schnobrich

Granny Hazelbide

### Troublesome Contest

\$25.00 for the best answer to the question, "Why Was Troublesome of Brightwater Banished?". 25 to 1,000 words, any format that's legible, poetry fine; deadline 1982 August 1. If you want your entry returned, enclose one 20¢ stamp. If you want a copy of the 100 Best Entries (and your own, in case it's not in the top 100), enclose two 20¢ stamps. [If you want to win, enclose 250 20¢ stamps.] Copyright remains with you, of course. Entries should go to Suzette Haden Elgin, Route 4 Box 192E, Huntsville, AR 72740.

### available: THE CACHER OF THE RYE BY CARL BRANDON

Terry Carr's historical introduction tells the whole hysterical story of the most famous fannish hoax ever, and introduces one of the best known works by Carl Brandon. *The Cacher of the Rye* was published to honor Terry Carr at WisCon and is still available at \$7.00 apiece (\$7.50, foreign) from Obsessive Press, Box 1624, Madison, WI 53701.

tion of the 500th anniversary of the founding of the Confederation, and she goes on a quest to find the guilty party. *The Grand Jubilee* deals with the celebration and the dissension when the delegates of the Confederated Kingdoms meet, ending with the dissolution of the Confederation. *And Then There'll Be Fireworks* covers the disastrous events after the Confederation is dissolved and Responsible is placed in a pseudocoma by the Magicians of Rank.

In a review of Elgin's work in *Aurora 19*, the point is made that her SF is non-sexist. Not so here. On Ozark the men are do-nothing incompetents who have to be looked after; they think they're running the government of the planet, but nobody seems to take them seriously but themselves. The women folk are the important ones. Girl babies must be properly Named; boys can have any old name as long as it sounds nice. Girls go to Granny School where they are taught the fundamentals of Granny Magic and hear such bits of wisdom as that quoted at the beginning of this review. Boys go to school too, but they just learn things like geography and never anything about Granny Magic. Even Ozark's Magicians of Rank, the most powerful males on the planet, screw up royally in the course of the trilogy and have to have the problems solved by the women. What happened to Elgin's non-sexism?

At WisCon, Elgin admitted that this work was sexist and intentionally so for a couple of reasons. First, she was tired of reading books by males and being accused of over-sensitivity when offensive passages were pointed out to the authors; *The Ozark Trilogy* seemed a good place to turn the tables. More importantly, Elgin wrote what she knew. In the Ozarks (Earth's) there really is a female subculture, a lore which is handed down from mother to daughter and which the men never learn about. The planet Ozark reflects this culture transplanted a thousand or so years down the road. (Elgin related the anecdote of a male colleague, also an Ozark native, who was terribly offended when she commented on the female lore of the Ozarks and suggested that he, as a man, had absolutely no understanding or awareness of it. He later apologized to her; he'd spoken with his female relatives in the mountains and learned that Elgin was, indeed, correct.)

The sexism in Elgin's work is tongue in cheek; I don't believe that she really thinks all men are total klutzes. But, it gives pause. I wonder if perhaps there is some kind of universal female smugness and sense of superiority; a feeling that, at least in some areas, men are weak and women must pick up the pieces. I know that the main credos of the Grannies—(1) If a man does something right, it's an accident; (2) If a man does something wrong, it's to be expected; (3) A woman must never let a man know the first two things; and (4) There is nothing more despicable than a woman who cannot cope—seemed awfully familiar to me as I read them, and I never went to Granny School. (When a little girl in Granny School remarked that it didn't seem fair the Granny screeched "Fair! This is the real world...") Other women I've talked to about these books seem to share my feeling that

they've heard it all before, but they're not sure where.

In any case, *The Ozark Trilogy* has nearly everything—magic, telepathy, exotic indigenous species, legends, humor, romance, even a touch of mystery. The Grannies are sure to remind you of some elderly relative. The language, especially that of the Grannies, is delightful and, more importantly, real—you can hear the inflections and imagine your own elderly relative saying those very words. *The Ozark Trilogy* is entertaining and very readable. What are you waiting for?

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### ***Taking the Quantum Leap: The New Physics for Non-Scientists***

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By Fred Alan Wolf  
Harper & Row, 1981

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### ***The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics***

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By Gary Zukav  
Bantam, William Morrow, 1979

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**Patty Lucas**

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In the last few years, there has been a spate of books published all about physics (minus the math) for non-scientists. This is a good thing. Most people these days have given up trying to understand or follow what scientists do. I don't mean minutiae like how to use calculus to plot the course of Halley's Comet, but the big stuff, like "what are comets?". In the field of physics, this unfortunate ignorance is contagious and can very well be likened to a black hole. The reasons for this are legion, ranging from negative learning experiences back in skool, to the clammy clutches of religion, television addiction, or mind-decaying jobs. Anyway, it all adds up to bad news for holy democracy, which depends for its success on an educated voting populace. Any attempt at rectifying the current situation should be applauded, and so I do, I really do, applaud science books for non-scientists. Two recent examples are *Taking the Quantum Leap* and *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*.

In *Wu Li Masters* Gary Zukav suggests right off that you read the book for pleasure, not to learn it; if you follow his advice you will enjoy the book and get a feel for 20th Century physics. Considering the complexity and difficulty in presentation of the subject matter, Zukav does OK in getting the narrative to flow. He spends enough time on each of the different aspects (indeterminism, complementarity, relativity, etc.) (Just please don't ask me to define them.) so that you have some image or analogy to associate with and remember them by. It's tough going, though; you have to concentrate. There are footnotes throughout, contributed by four different physicists (Zukav is not a physicist but a writer by trade), which provide a running commentary on the text; a nice touch.

The idea for this book apparently grew out





Joan Hanke-Woods

of a physics conference held at the Esalen Institute in Northern California. Among the participants was a T'ai Chi master who came up with the idea of defining physics as "Wu Li", which means "patterns of organic energy"; hence the name of this book. Chinese words can have many meanings depending on inflection, combination with other words, etc. It happens that "Wu Li" can also mean "My Way", "Nonsense", "I Clutch My Ideas", and "Enlightenment". The conferees were pretty taken with the relationships between these phrases and quantum mechanics, and in fact Zukav titles the sections in his book with these various meanings for "Wu Li".

Although Zukav has his share of unintelligible moments, he does better than Fred Alan Wolf in *Taking the Quantum Leap*. Wolf writes about philosophy well enough but his attempts at describing quantum mechanics are pretty clumsy. This is perhaps understandable, but I can't forgive him for the cutesiness of his descriptions (Mr. Rogers Explains Physics. Bleah!). Some sections were so simplistic as to be meaningless. No matter how simplified the presentation, a writer still should at least make a stab at defining his or her terms.

Wolf uses an historical/chronological framework for his book, tracing the development of physics from ancient Greece to the present. This sounds like a good idea, except that when you get to quantum mechanics, relativity and such, the framework tends to get a little rickety. Maybe that's just my shortcomings. But it seems to me that the end product (physics right now) is difficult enough to understand (without math) without going through

all the historical convolutions since Planck's Constant in 1900. However, the timelines inserted throughout the book were appreciated. Also the charming illustrations by Ed Tabor.

There is one thing that has undoubtedly prejudiced me against *Taking the Quantum Leap*, and that is that Wolf has apparently swallowed Julian Jaynes' theory about human evolution. This theory is outlined in Jaynes' book *The Origin of Consciousness and the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. In it Jaynes asserts that humans became conscious only about 3,000 years ago, when the right and left hemispheres of the brain became "connected". This theory is hard to accept.

Both books are bound towards philosophy and religion from the start. They both wind up with Bell's Theorem, which might have to do with the unbroken inter-connectedness of the universe. Really. From there Zukav heads East to (Hindu) Kali and (Buddhist) "tantra", and Wolf heads West to God's will, human will, and Moses.

Having said at the beginning of this review that science books for non-scientists are a good thing, I would now like to add a few qualifications. Authors should guard against oversimplification of complex concepts. It is sometimes better to break the flow of beautiful words with some good old-fashioned textbook structure in order to keep track of everything. I don't think it would scare people away to have, say, a one-page outline or summary per chapter.

Also, I don't think it's worth it to explain the development of physics historically to non-scientists. It's too complicated. By the time the reader gets to the present day, it's often unclear as to what past discoveries and theories have been superseded or integrated or whatever.

For me the ideal way to learn about physics would be to have a Merlin-type teacher sit me down on a tree stump in the middle of the primeval forest, and lecture away. Oh, well. I am told that *The Tao of Physics* by Fritjof Capra is the ultimate book in this realm, so barring an encounter with Merlin, I guess I'll have to read it sometime. Both Zukav and Wolf list it in their bibliographies.

Following are some of the blue-ribbon insights that I absorbed from *Taking the Quantum Leap* and *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*:

In the subatomic world we cannot be passive observers, we always affect our observations. Depending on which tools we are using, we can observe different effects. We actually create "reality" by choosing from an infinite range of possibilities; we reach in and freeze the probability wave. (I don't really understand all this—get back to me in a few decades.) You could say that the creative element in physics has blurred the distinctions between scientists, poets, musicians and artists. They all re-present the commonplace "to us in such a way that our self imposed limitations are expanded", in Zukav's words.

The realization that we must influence

what we observe has revolutionized not only physics, but it also has spilled over into the other sciences as well. In roundabout ways these ideas touch many fields. For instance, the concept of "pure objectivity" has certainly been questioned in fields such as anthropology, the arts, history, and journalism.

Now, being a practical woman, I always worry about the sciences lending ammo to politicians. I'm happy to see that quantum mechanics doesn't favor either of the two political poles of communism and libertarianism. That an atom is disturbed when we observe it reminds me of Marx's "in order to learn about a pear, you must take a bite". At the same time, dialectical materialism has much more in common with classical Newtonian physics and its machine-like determinism. Marx and Engels were true children of their times, as are we all.

Adam Smith and Monsieur Le Reagan, for example, would certainly applaud the possibility of quantum solipsism ("I" determine reality.) because that leads to the obvious conclusion that each person is the source of their own joy, sorrow, wealth, poverty, and choices. However, Mao sez, "Big deal! Turn that around to read: We are all able to choose a different path to follow and therefore change our present miserable circumstances via revolutionary action."

It is clear that students need additional methods of learning about physics. Quantum mechanics cannot be visualized; and so, since we are sight-centered creatures, we are uncomfortable with it. Somehow we must start with the "whole" instead of its component parts. Zukav mentions that 21st Century physics curricula might include meditation. Who knows? He also quotes a 14th Century Tibetan Buddhist by the name of Longchenpa, who might have been a premier physicist had he lived today. Longchenpa wrote:

Since everything is but an apparition  
Perfect in being what it is,  
Having nothing to do with good or bad,  
Acceptance or rejection,  
One may well burst out in laughter.

I did.

## Bogstad Continued from P. 12

else. The Bramble/Drinkwater/Barnable family are the mediators in this battle as inhabitants of both realms.

*Little, Big* intertwines this fairy/human battle with the disintegration of Western civilization. (Yeats used a similar metaphorical structure in his poetry and his mystical work *A Vision*.) The battle becomes as believable as the characters, including such vivid mediators as the unsuspecting George Mouse, father of a changeling, who is not quite sure of his connection with the Barnables or with reality. Here is his attempt to cope with New York's city-state:

Old Law Farm had had the virtue of necessity. These dark days, if you

wanted fresh eggs, milk, butter, at less than ruinous prices, there was nothing for it but to supply them yourself. And the square of long-empty buildings was uninhabitable anyway, so its outside windows were blinded with tin or blackened plywood, its doors stopped with cinder block, and became the hollow castle wall around a farm.

Old Law Farm is in the heart of New York city, at the heart of a world where "electricity is mostly unavailable" but was once; where reality fades daily into what we would normally call fantasy; and where people can find themselves turned into storks, fish, or herons--bemused ciphers in a huge battle plan. (Which is, of course, conveniently conceived and drawn up in a book written by John Drinkwater near the turn of the century and available only to the members of his family.)

Although a long book, *Little, Big* is gripping and delightful, thematically linked from beginning to end with abundant side-trips to complicate the journey. Whether fantasy elements make it, as well as Lessing's and Kress's works, into a fantasy work as a whole, I am unwilling to state. One point of the work is the calling into question of those very classifications and thus a reflection on the nature of fiction as language capable of engendering delight as well as changing perspectives.

More than many novels I have read in the past few years, the seven above are unrelenting as a whole in their requirement that a reader experience language as play in order to experience the narrative worlds they create.

## Project Apollo by Robert F. Whisler



I looked up in time to see  
the moon bolt out of sight.  
It plunged like a bathysphere  
deep into cosmic depths  
beyond Earth's shallow atmosphere.

Uncle Sam and brother Goddard  
pimp for the virgin's plummet.  
From Palomar a Cyclopien eye  
squints, observing with a voyeur's pleasure  
Apollo's appalling lust for Artemis.

Her indrawn face flares into a frown.  
Myth and science, incest and flight are over.  
For your children, Latona, groan.  
Your daughter wanders now, like Io, out of orbit.  
The night is dark and I am alone.



he lived for nine months in a room without light. Outside her window was another apartment building, seven feet away. Its green wall was her sky. If she walked out on the porch and leaned her head past the rain gutter, she could see a strip of blue between the two buildings.

When she first moved in, she built reflectors out of mylar to catch the sun from that crack and bounce it off the back wall of the room. It worked better on cloudy days. Then the sun moved out of the crack, and the reflectors got ripped up in a few rainstorms, and she took them down and wrapped Christmas presents in them.

She worked in an office where there were no windows. Everything was grey-brown metal. Fluorescent lights hummed above her. She sometimes imagined crickets or an electric "om". She'd run outside during breaks to drink up the sun. Her face became a moon of sunlight.

She collected the sunlight in her face and took it home with her. She glowed. Each day she brought home an hour's worth of power in each cheek. She'd use up a few seconds to beam her nose at the lock so she could fit in her key. Then she'd pour the rest into dark glass jars which she kept in the back of the closet.

One day the landlord came by to collect the rent as usual. Once a month he'd use his pass key to gather up white envelopes taped to the back of the door, filled with earnings, savings, dreams. He'd also use this time to inspect his property—to assess new damages or improvements—and raise the rent accordingly.

"Damn!" He fumbled with a flashlight at her door. This apartment was his monthly annoyance. *So dark—hard to inspect the premises—to notice any changes—she must live like a mole.* He beamed the flashlight around the room.

"Ahah!" He noticed a crack of light slipping under the closet door. *That's tenants for you—leaving lights on in closets. No wonder the electric bills are so high!* (He paid utilities.)

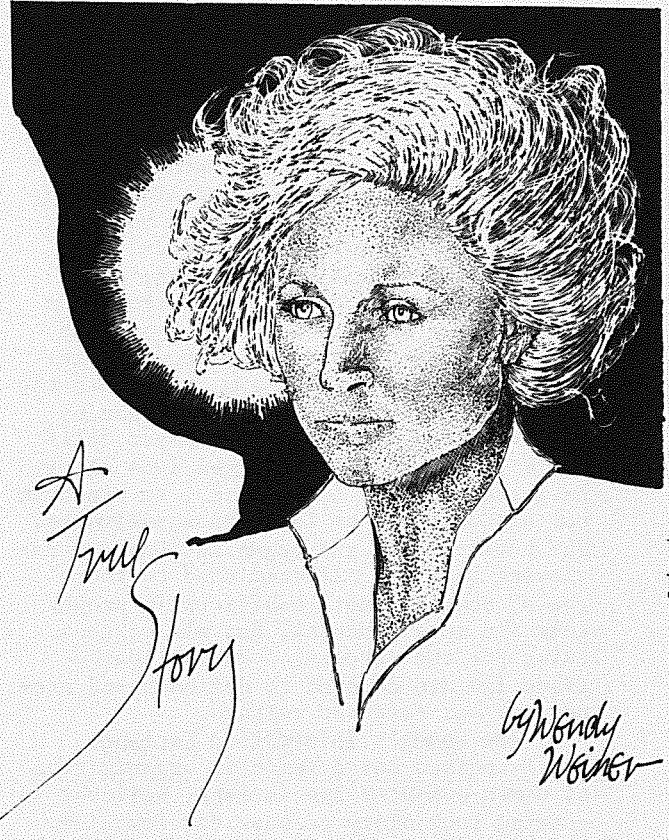
He opened the closet door and followed the soft glow to the back of the closet. There he gasped in amazement. Neatly lined up in rows three-deep were dark glass jars glowing brightly, humming softly.

"Bottled energy! Captured sunlight!" Dollar signs danced in his head. "Packaged power!" He licked his lips.

He grabbed the nearest jar and held it against him, feeling its warmth, its radiance. This glowing embryo. It hummed against his chest. For a moment he felt truly divine.

He gazed into the dark glass at the swirling mass of light. He was captivated. He wanted to touch this substance, plunge his fingers into its depths.

He opened the lid.



A sudden flash of intense luminosity engulfed him  
//stark white//  
then  
/black/

\*\*\*

The door to her apartment stood open, so she quickly turned off the beam from her nose. *Is it the first of the month again? God, I hate running into the landlord! And I haven't paid my rent.* "Hello?"

No answer. The room held its familiar gloom, but a strange glow was hovering in the corner near the closet. Could someone have broken in?

She approached the glow cautiously and heard it humming ever so softly as it slowly rose and bathed the room in soft light.

She checked the rest of the apartment for the intruder. When she opened the closet door, only the familiar glow greeted her. Then she noticed one of the dark glass jars on the floor, lying on its side, empty. *And what's that next to it? Looks like a glob of metal or something—still warm—could that have been a ring of keys in that molten mess?*

She mused for a moment, the glow humming an accompaniment.

"Well, if someone were here, thank God they're not now. Maybe I should call the police—or at least notify the landlord about getting some better locks or something." She considered all this as she poured her day's savings into the empty jar.



he theme for this installment of "Other Doors" is connections. Anyone who knows me at all knows what a passion I have for access, knows how much I love bibliographies, especially bibliographies of bibliographies; knows how my bookshelves overflow with directories, indexes, guides and Yellow Pages; and knows my favorite publications are those that tell me where to get other publications. Connections are all the more important in this day and age, what with the Moral Majority *et. al.* trying to make us all over into nice Christian paper dolls. It is important to be plugged into alternative sources of information, to preserve our history, and to form strong networks. The publications and organizations I'm reviewing here are all committed to these goals; some are more ambitious in scope, some are more personal, but all of them exist for the purpose of making connections and are devoted to defining and preserving our feminist culture.

The Women's Information Exchange, a San Francisco based feminist organization of women computer specialists, believes in putting technology to work for feminism. "No matter how you feel about technology, it's indisputable that computers are here to stay. The Women's Information Exchange ...believes that computers can, and should be, used to support the efforts of women and women's groups throughout the country." They have formed the National Women's Mailing List, a computerized data bank through which women's projects, organizations and individuals can request mailing labels according to geography, demography and various areas of interest. The List is entirely voluntary, no one will be put on the list without her consent. When you register, you can select your areas of interest from subject headings such as culture, sports, legal/political issues, health, violence against women, lesbian, and women of color, and you control the level of access to your name. You can restrict it to women and women-only groups, or you can make it available to mixed groups. The List is open to men as well as women.

Registration is free, but a \$3.50 donation will cover the cost of your registration, and a donation of \$10 or more will help pay for a publicity campaign. This last is sorely needed. Up to now the List has been growing through word of mouth and through label exchanges with national organizations willing to send out registration forms along with their regular mailings. Says Deborah Brecher, "We still aren't large enough to do regional and local mailings. One of the biggest uses of the List—to keep members informed

about local events, isn't possible until we get larger." You can help the List grow by registering and by spreading the word. The Women's Information Exchange will send you registration forms in bulk to distribute in your area (or at conventions...). Write The Women's Information Exchange, 1195 Valencia Street, San Francisco, CA 94110.

**Women's Network** is a lesbian feminist newsletter edited by Dorothy Feola. It's primarily a reviewzine concerned with lesbian and feminist novels, poetry, and nonfiction published by small presses (where most of the best lesbian and feminist novels, poetry and nonfiction is coming from these days). *Women's Network* also contains news, clippings, letters and some poetry. Contributions are welcome.

The layout is pretty bad, but that shouldn't bother most of you, being used to reading fanzines. If you can get past the layout, you'll be rewarded for your trouble. Feola sees her zine as a way of keeping in touch with other women (Now doesn't that sound familiar?) and sharing information about what women are doing. I only wish she could publish it more frequently; she is only able to bring it out twice a year. Single issues are \$1 (back issues 50¢) from Dorothy Feola, 2137 Quimby Ave., Bronx, NY 10473.

The **Lesbian Herstory Archives** exists to gather and preserve records of lesbian lives and activities so that future generations of lesbians will have ready access to materials relevant to their lives. The process of gathering this material will also serve to uncover and collect our herstory denied to us previously by patriarchal historians in the interests of the culture that they serve. The existence of these Archives will enable us to analyze and re-evaluate the lesbian experience.

This is the beginning of the statement of purpose of the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York, a collective run as a labor of love by women passionately devoted to their history. In addition to the Archive itself, the collective produces slide shows that travel all over the country, a poster series, and study groups on various areas of lesbian life.

Each issue of their **Newsletter** is a resource work that reaches beyond the Archive itself. Along with listings of the Archive's holdings, it includes bibliographies, letters by women doing research, calls for information and guides to lesbian periodicals. The *Newsletter* is available free to any woman on request, but if you can send it, a donation will help pay for publishing costs. The suggested donation is \$3.00/year. For more information write The Lesbian Herstory

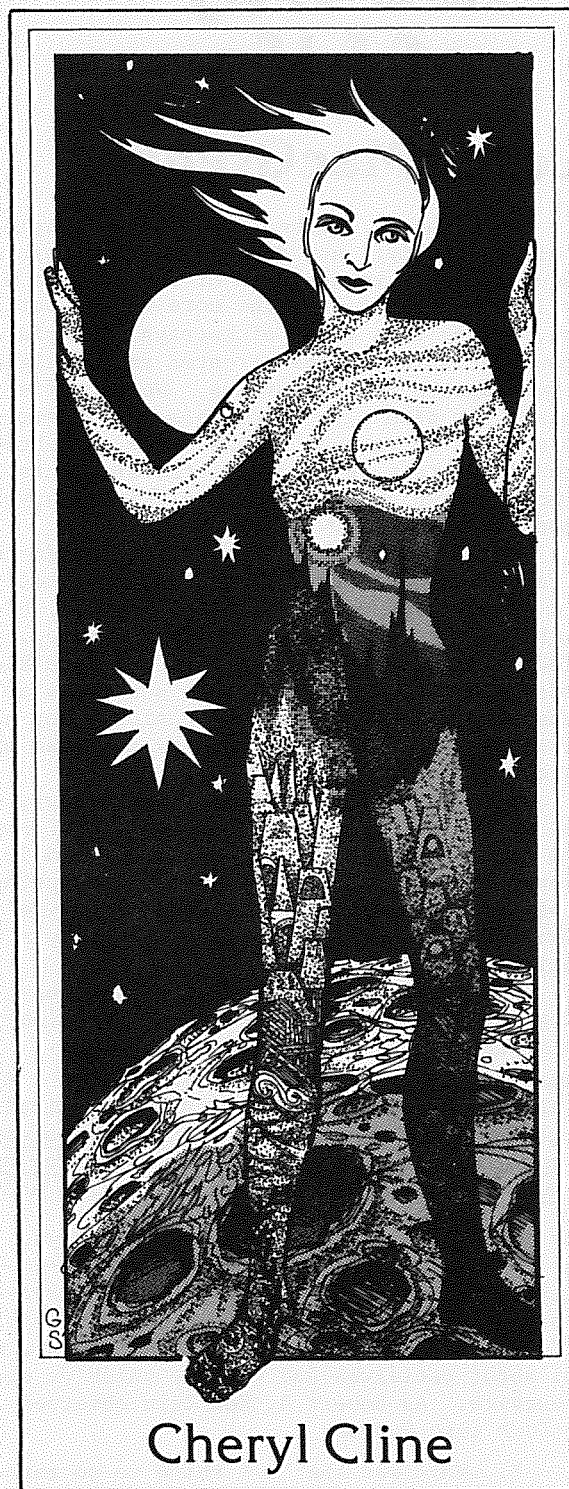


Archives, PO Box 1258, New York, NY 10016.

**Women Artist News** is an excellent newsletter covering women artists in all areas of the arts, from painters to photographers to mail artists to art critics. It carries articles on individual women artists, both past and contemporary. The January/February 1982 issue, for example, has articles on the women Russian constructivists, on painters Lee Krasner (who worked with Jackson Pollock), Miriam Laufer, Ellen Day Hale, Agnes Richmon, and on photographer Berenice Abbott. Each issue also carries reviews of exhibitions, book reviews, conference reports and an extensive almanac of events. In addition, some issues are devoted to bibliographic surveys of books by and about women artists. This is a great newsletter to get to keep up on what contemporary women artists are doing and to read about "lost" women artists of the past. It's frequent, and the price is right too. If you buy it on the newsstands, it's \$2.50 a copy, but subscriptions are \$8.50 for six issues, or about \$1.40 a copy. Write Women Artist News, PO Box 3304 Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

**Processed World** is published by a group of dissatisfied office workers (both male and female) in the San Francisco Bay Area. It includes satire, such as the Office Olympics (which features the Telephone Toss; and the Race to Erase, in which you're given 30 minutes to erase information stored in your company's computers); personal narratives, in their series of reader's horror stories of past jobs, "Tales of Toil"; news and news analysis; and serious essays on the social and economic conditions of office workers and other workers. Issue #2 contains an article on the impact of temporary workers on the job market and on organizing; #3 includes a long article called "Female Troubles: Wage Work and Housework". As far as I can tell, *Processed World* is a leftist-feminist magazine with no particular affiliations. It can be incredibly idealistic, and the writing sometimes lapses into Radical Purple Prose; its strength lies in its spirit of spit-in-your-eye camaraderie and the sardonic humor directed at De Boss. It has a very lively letter column. If you live near San Francisco, or if you ever get out that way, *Processed World* "invites you, your friends and your co-workers to come and meet fellow dissidents and have a few drinks. Every other Wednesday starting January 27 at SPEC's Twelve Adler Museum Cafe (on Columbus). 'After Work.'" Or write *Processed World*, 55 Sutter St., #829, San Francisco, CA 94104. Single copies are \$1.50, subscriptions are \$10/year (\$5/year low income, or \$75/year for corporations or government agencies).

## Other Doors



Georgie Schnobrich

Cheryl Cline

## Women's Small Press Reviews

# Technology Is a Way of Life

Loren MacGregor

The image of technology to many people is clear, looming, and dangerous. The more we discover, the more we learn of the dangers of our last discovery—and the more we suspect the next. There is a sense of betrayal, partially because science has been treated as a religion in our culture for many years. We ask of scientists: "Why didn't you know this was dangerous? Why weren't we warned?" This sense of betrayal often leads to a rejection of the artifacts of technology, which get lumped in which everything demonstrably bad about society.

Well, yes and no. Many of the products of technology are bad. Technology by itself is a small idiot child, burbling happily, blowing bubbles of saliva, obviously contented. An onlooker might stop and say, "What a cute kid! Wonder what she'll be like when she grows up?" Technology is amoral, neither positive nor negative; applications of technology can make any object a threat.

Our view is too limited. Technology, to most of us, is cars and F-101s and styrofoam cups and disposable razors, but not (even in science fiction, it seems) "magic", telepathy, or psychic powers—or, as in Vonda McIntyre's *Dreamsnake*, conscious control of the body's regulating systems.

There's a definition I like that puts things in perspective. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* defines "technology" as:

**technology... 1 : Technical language; 2 : A technical method of achieving a practical purpose; and 3 : The totality of means employed to provide objects necessary for human sustenance and comfort.** [Emphasis added.]

That definition means exactly what it says. "The totality of means employed" can be—is—anything and everything that helps us survive. It's also loaded. What is "survival"? What is "comfort"? Our definitions indicate how we feel about ourselves and what we think we need to survive. As Robert A. Heinlein observed in *The Door into Summer*:

"...What was the last thing to go automatic? Answer: any housewife's house. I didn't attempt to figure out a sensible scientific house; women didn't want one; they simply wanted a better-upholstered cave. But housewives were still complaining about the servant problem long after servants had gone the way of the mastodon. I had rarely met a housewife who did not have a touch of slaveholder in her; they seemed to think

there really ought to be strapping peasant girls grateful for a chance to scrub floors fourteen hours a day and eat table scraps at wages a plumber's helper would scorn.

"That's why we called the monster *Hired Girl*—it brought back thoughts of the semi-slave immigrant girl Grandma used to bully."

Science fiction has been called "the literature of the future". But whose future? On the one hand, we have writers whose works convey a bright, cheerful view of the future. (*The Door Into Summer* is more than a catchy title, it's a way of life.) These writers often react testily when that view is challenged. Heinlein, for example, could not foresee the future in anything except technical terms. It was inconceivable to him that a time would come when women, far from wanting a "better upholstered cave," would want to get out of the cave entirely.

On the other hand were the visions of writers who were much less optimistic. Thomas M. Disch summarizes a general attitude in his introduction to *The Ruins of Earth*:

The fifties were also the age of the Bomb. Nuclear catastrophe and its aftermath was then, for most of us, the worst nightmare we could imagine. It was unequivocally awful and (unlike today's horrors) direct. The bombs themselves were measured in units of how many millions of us they would kill—in "megadeaths".

One learned to live with the bombs largely by looking the other way, by concentrating on the daytime, suburban side of existence. And here we are, a quarter century after Hiroshima, and the bombs still haven't dropped. Looking the other way seems to have worked.

Now, in 1971, it isn't possible to look the other way. It is the daytime, suburban side of existence that has become our nightmare.

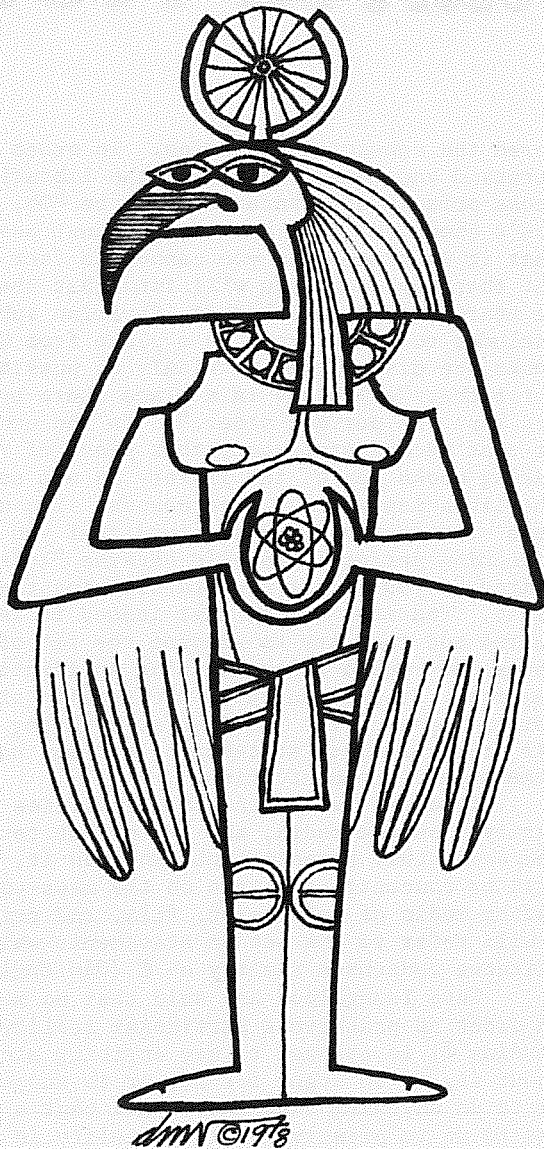
For such writers, a "happy ending" is one in which things won't get any worse.

Yet even the pessimistic view derives most of its force from the reverence in which technology was once held. It is largely because people considered technology "magic" and "good", only to have it turn on them, that they reject it. Donald Kennedy, in an article entitled "One View of Research Ethics" [*Washington Post*, 1982 Jan. 17], provides a more practical appraisal of the role of scientists and technicians:

Science is not magic, not different from other human activities. It is an enterprise we pursue for social gain, and it has been, by and large, an effective one.

Once we discard the baggage of reverence (because fear is a form of reverence, too), we can more readily accept that technology cannot hurt us unless we let it; we can decide what we will and won't respect, which areas are blind alleys and which aren't. Jeanne Gomoll, in a personal letter, expressed it well:





David M. Vereschagin

"Anti-technological" opinions [may be] another form of technology [whose] particular forms don't come pre-packaged with all sorts of associations from their use in the past...If we separate the associations of how certain technological forms were used in the past, and focus on ways to use (or identify) useful forms in the future apart from that experience, we're likely to find some useful lessons...[I]t would be good if an author could manage to break the tyranny of assumptions/associations, and actually show a familiar technology, and show that it's the way it's used that counts.

Avedon Carol, concluding her article, "Androgynous Futures" in *Aurora* 20, states, "[I]t isn't the people who need re-designing—it's the society as a whole that needs work, and that

can't be done with wires and chemicals and chips and buttons and knobs." It's a good assessment; the re-designing has to come from our restructuring of how we think about things: instead of designing different tools, redefining the task. We could realize, as Delany points out in *Nova*, that neurotic attention to the removal of dirt is only necessary if medical care is inadequate for the task of prevention. We could realize, as does Vonda McIntyre in *Dreamsnake*, that "medical care" can mean something other than official sanction by the American Medical Association, that a "healer" is someone who heals, and that doing so in a skilled manner which can be taught presupposes a high technology, whether the products of that technology are immediately visible or not.

Some people think of technology as destructive because they are familiar with the problems that come from using machines. They see that we've made bad mistakes with machines, therefore, they conclude that machines are bad, and so they reject technology.

What happens then is simple: the two sides, pro-technology and anti-technology, argue and fight and wrestle and wrangle. No conclusions are reached.

The answer may lie in some middle ground. This land may be inhabited by someone like Walt Disney, for example, who went ahead and build an energy-efficient city with pleasant living conditions, quick and convenient rapid transit, invisible but accessible essential services, and reliable heating and cooling systems, because no one bothered to tell him it was impossible or that the technology wasn't available. He'd simply say, "Gee, it would be nice if the pavement were resilient so people wouldn't get so tired walking." or "I don't see why rapid transit can't be fun as well as expedient." or "You know, I really don't like looking at all those pipes and wires and things. Why don't we put them underground in tunnels so we can get at them, but keep them out of the way?". His assistants would then nod, scratch their heads, and build him what he wanted. Nobody had told them it wasn't impossible, either. (Disney didn't know enough to realize he was talking about the infrastructural city every architect designs in her spare time, knowing it's impossible.)

A majority of science-fiction stories talk about the future, and either (1) the dates are changed but everything else is the same or everything has changed but not really. Either way, the stories follow old, tired paths.

It's time to rethink our image of technology; it's time to twist it and turn it, reach down and pull it inside out, and see what's really there. Demystify it. Punch holes in it. Act like Calvin Trillin who, in attempting to get fired from the "Religion" page of *Time* insisted on inserting the word "alleged" in key sentences: "Jesus Christ, the alleged savior"; "the alleged parting of the Red Sea"; "The Bible, allegedly the word of God". Technology is allegedly good for you; but it matters a great deal how you define it.

# Why a Woman Is Not

Suzette Haden Elgin

*[This article, originally delivered as a guest-of-honor speech on March 6 at NisCon 6, is copyright © 1982 by the author.]*

I'm going to talk about realities here. Heaven knows, the one we've got is very odd, but let's not talk about that. Let's consider instead what a reality is.

For the *ameba* it may be something quite different, because the *ameba* apparently experiences reality directly, without any sort of filters intervening. Human beings don't do that. We experience reality through a number of cognitive and perceptual filters, filters that protect us from a kind of overload on our circuits; and then we express that perception of reality as a set of statements.

So, for the human being, reality is simply a set of statements. A culture develops when some group agrees that a particular shared set of statements—its consensus set—represents the real world. Our current American set contains statements like the following:

- \*Ronald Reagan was a movie actor.
- \*Mountains are higher than plains.
- \*The gods don't give you three chances.
- \*Nobody cares about straight seams anymore.

And so on. A common term for such sets is "paradigm", but it has connotations of regularity and elegance that "set" does not. For the most part, I will be using the more neutral term.

Within a culture there will be specialized subsets of statements. There might be a set for the hunter, one for the winetaster, one for the ballerina, etc., and these subsets aren't always meaningful to the nonspecialist. But unless the specialist is willing to accept all or almost all of the statements in the consensus set, that specialist cannot really be part of the culture. That's a problem that physicists have right now: they have trouble finding anyone else to talk to. But physicists are privileged in that they can talk to one another, they know what it is they want to talk about, and they know in what way their attempts at communication differ from the statements of the consensus set (or derived from those in the consensus set). Women don't have all that luxury available to them. I'll explain that as I go along.

Now, George Miller has said that, if you want to understand what somebody says, you have to assume it is true and then try to imagine what it is true of. He is saying: for human beings, you have to assume that what they say is true and then try to imagine what set of reality statements they would have to subscribe to in order that such a thing could be true. An illustration will help. We have all encountered the unhelpful librarian. In order to understand and communicate with the librarian whose primary utterance seems to be "Oh, you can't check out that book!", you must assume that it is true—that you cannot in fact check out that book—and you will find that the set of statements to which that librarian subscribes includes not "A library is a place from which books are distributed as widely as possible," but rather "A library is a place where books are kept, in perfect order." In the context of that second statement, that piece of reality, taking books out of the library is not something the librarian wants to see happen. You need the same strategy when you are told that you must do something perfectly idiotic because "It's required."; you'll get nowhere claiming that it isn't. You must assume that indeed it is required and then try to imagine the set of statements that would allow anything so idiotic to be true. If you can enter the reality of the person imposing the requirement by using one of his or her reality statements, you may have some hope of communicating.

Nowadays, we learn about realities primarily from the media, and I use that term in the sense that Marshall McLuhan used it, although I'll be concentrating here on the mass-communication media of television, film, and print. I will refer to the set of statements which constitutes consensus reality as  $\mathbb{C}$  (Old English "C").

Gena Youngblood has said that no medium, in order to preserve a particular reality (including  $\mathbb{C}$ ) is obliged to say anything nice about it, or to argue for it, or to support it, or to do anything like that. All that a medium has to do to preserve a given reality is to present no alternative. If you have never known that there was anything edible except fried chicken and brussels sprouts, you are not going to want strawberries. All that television, or any of the visual or print media, has to do to support  $\mathbb{C}$  is simply to continue to present it, as if there were no other possibility. The media can even argue against it, so long as all they do is present in detail those things against which they argue rather than an alternative.

In this context, the question "What do women really want?" ceases to be a catch phrase. It may not be a question that can be answered within ordinary frames of reference. A woman can only express what she really wants in the form of statements of the language that she uses; and then you must imagine what those statements could be true of. And, at the moment, although a woman may have the feeling that there's something very wrong with the reality she's got, and may be able to express



# Like a Physicist

Speech delivered at WisCon, March 1982

in crucifying detail every aspect of that reality,<sup>1</sup> that does not necessarily help her answer the question. She would have to be able to tell you what it was that she would prefer in place of the reality she's got, you see.

Science fiction, including SF fantasy, has offered women an extraordinary opportunity—the potential to present alternative models of reality for other women to examine. The function of a model like that is first of all to make the fish aware that they are in water and secondly to suggest that there is somewhere else they might prefer to be. Up to now, women have used science fiction for this purpose in two ways. First, they have described an alternative reality,  $\mathbb{B}$ , a matriarchy.  $\mathbb{C}$  says "Women are subordinate to men."  $\mathbb{B}$  says "Women are not subordinate to men; men are subordinate to women." Formally, "The feature +[male] is rewritten as the feature +[female] in the context power." Second, women have presented androgyny (Reality  $\mathbb{A}$ ) as an alternative reality.  $\mathbb{A}$  says "Women are not subordinate to men, and men are not subordinate to women; they are equal." Formally, "The set of features +[male] and +[female] is rewritten as null in the context power."

Please note that formally neither one of these amounts to much of a change. Formally, a set of statements is a linear list.<sup>2</sup> In the real world, however, and inside the human mind, the set of statements that constitutes  $\mathbb{C}$  is a dynamic network, an equilibrium. And making a change in any statement in the set, even a very small change, affects every other statement in the set.

The women who have been exploring  $\mathbb{B}$  and  $\mathbb{A}$  have been making one small change, as a way of exploring what might happen. And it may very well be that other women, reading those models, reading those descriptions of alternative realities, will say "Aha! That is what I always wanted, and I never knew it until now!" I am not putting down either of those alternatives.

But there's a third alternative (which is, of course, nameless), which I will call Reality  $\mathbb{O}$ .<sup>3</sup>  $\mathbb{O}$  says "Women are neither subordinate to men nor superior to men, nor equal to men; they are radically different from men." That's  $\mathbb{O}$ ,

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Marilyn French's *The Women's Room*.

<sup>2</sup>It is, of course, possible to impose hierarchy upon that linearity, but the formalization quickly becomes indecipherable if any attempt is made to achieve adequacy.

<sup>3</sup>"X", "Y", "Z", "Q", "W", and "R" are the male variables; let's use "O" this time.

the strange reality of the third kind, which so far as I know has never been done in science fiction or anywhere else.

At which point, the question is "Why not?" It is the obvious third alternative, however strange it may be; why hasn't it been done?

There are a couple of major reasons.

Ordinarily, when you want to construct an alternative reality—or even an alternative piece of a reality—you use the mechanism of metaphor. A metaphor is a set of statements that constitutes a limited reality,  $\mathbb{L}$ . There are many possible  $\mathbb{L}$ s, and none of them matches  $\mathbb{C}$ , but all of them are sufficiently like  $\mathbb{C}$  in a sufficient number of ways so that people can imagine what reality the set of statements in  $\mathbb{L}$  would be true of, because they can establish links between  $\mathbb{L}$  and  $\mathbb{C}$ .

From the perception of one concrete object—a toilet, say—you can immediately infer a whole set of other concrete objects, such as walls and floors and a door that locks.<sup>4</sup> In the same way, from one statement in a metaphor you can infer all the rest of the statements. The metaphor of the Old West has become encoded, embedded, in American culture, so that if you hear that  $\mathbb{L}_{\text{OW}}$  contains the statement "Cowboys never mistreat their horses," you can immediately infer that it also contains "All women who run saloons have hearts of gold." and "Whatever there is, there's always more of it." You can get vast numbers of Americans moving just by shouting "Wagons, ho!"<sup>5</sup>

Using the mechanism of metaphor,  $\mathbb{B}$  says "Woman reality is like man reality, except that the gender values are reversed."  $\mathbb{A}$  uses the mechanism of metaphor to say "Woman reality is

<sup>4</sup>Especially a door that locks.

<sup>5</sup>President Kennedy, who was our last genuinely successful communicator as a president, understood this very well. He understood that metaphors are efficient metaphors of power; he called his administration the New Frontier, knowing that from that people would infer such things as "Whatever there is, there's always more of it," thus accomplishing a lot of his work for him with ease and dispatch. President Reagan has been trying, but he keeps trying to combine  $\mathbb{L}_{\text{OW}}$  with  $\mathbb{L}_{\text{BE}}$  (the limited reality of the British Empire), and it isn't working. It would probably be simplest if our politicians would follow the fine example of Stewart Brand and call their administrations "The Last New Frontier", "The Next Last New Frontier", "The Latest Next Last New Frontier", and so on; they have perhaps underestimated the public tolerance.

like man reality, except that the gender values are irrelevant."  $\emptyset$  says "Woman reality is not like man reality at all." and it then becomes obligated to provide a whole, and wholly new, set of statements, indeed, those statements which would represent Reality  $\emptyset$ . And it is right there that women run into great difficulty; it's right there that you find the unrealized potential of science fiction. Because the only mechanism that is available to us for the expression of our perceptions of reality is language. And the only language available to women is one constructed by men, shaped by men, and controlled by men, from its earliest beginnings. We have no record of any other sort of language, ever, not in any society in the history of the world. If there ever was one, it is lost forever.

There is, for one thing, no vocabulary—no lexicon—available. There is not even a name, remember, for Reality  $\emptyset$ , as there is for  $\Lambda$  (androgyny) or  $\mathbb{M}$  (matriarchy).

Consider, please, the incredible proliferation of vocabulary items that exist for the discussion of weaponry. A "weapon"; that's a name, but it won't do. The slightest, the tiniest, difference in the physical characteristics of any weapon entitles it to an entirely new name of its own.<sup>6</sup> Menstruation, however—an experience of crucial importance to women—has only that one word, and it's almost impossible to pronounce the damned thing within the sound system of English. That there might be various experiences of menstruation, with different characteristics, is not allowed for; there is no vocabulary available. You need a vocabulary if you are going to construct a set of statements that represents a new reality.

And that is not the only problem. You see, any time that you use a language, you bring in, along with its vocabulary and its syntax, all of its presuppositions—all of the things that every utterance of that language means, whether it is present in the surface shape of the utterance or not.

Thus, one of the statements of man reality is "No experience supported only by introspection constitutes valid evidence." And so you say "Aha! In my woman reality, any experience supported only by introspection constitutes valid evidence!" But the moment you say that you are perforce including and accepting a statement from man reality: "The validity of an experience as evidence is determined, at least in part, by the presence or absence of introspection as its only support." And you can't get away from that; it is built into the language, providing a quite different sort of support for those who wish to claim that patriarchy—the status quo—is the only "natural" arrangement.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>The New American Roget's College Thesaurus © 1962 lists 240 words under "arms"; many people from the Society of Creative Anachronism could double that list.

<sup>7</sup>The society in my Ozark trilogy is a pseudo-patriarchy, thus no exception.

So far, women have only been able to write science fiction using male vocabulary, male syntax, male semantics, and male presuppositions. So far, it has not been possible for women to take full advantage of science fiction as a medium in which to present  $\emptyset$  for the examination of other women. Unlike the physicists, women do not know at precisely what points it is that their reality might differ from  $\emptyset$ , nor at what points in the set of statements the differences occur; furthermore, they can't even discuss this conveniently with one another.

It's all very well to say "Oh, all right, we will abandon language! We will use the dance, sculpture, painting, instrumental music, the arts....". Unfortunately, in our culture that is of very little use in terms of bringing about change. The fine arts are not media-available to most women. They are accessible only to the upper-class, elite, highly educated women who are relatively comfortable and who have no strong motivation to make real changes in the status quo. They are not available to the women for whom the part of  $\emptyset$  represented by country music and Harlequin romances constitutes the real world. And so long as that is true, statements about reality made outside language and through the arts are not going to be able to effect change. They will not be accessible to the vast majority of women, who will not be able to look at them or listen to them and say "Oh, that's just what I always wanted, if I had only known!". For the woman who is on her feet all day long six days a week as a clerk at Woolworth's, and who goes home at night to take care of three kids, and who spends every Sunday getting ready to do that all over again for six more days, the only medium available is language. That is perhaps the reason that some feminists have been saying that the single most essential task facing women is the construction of a new language. In this new language, SF could be written and understood by all women. The question is: "Can we do that, and, if so, how?"

George Leonard has said: "...beware. Any serious attempt at including unfamiliar phenomena in a certain verbal realm may change reality as perceived within that realm."<sup>8</sup> Beware, he says, and he is quite right. For example, it is certain that those women—and men—who have used science fiction as a vehicle for the description of  $\mathbb{M}$  and  $\Lambda$  have thereby changed reality as we know it, just enough, to allow us a glimpse of  $\emptyset$ .

Nevertheless, to perceive  $\emptyset$  is one thing; to write about it, to describe it so that others may perceive it, is another. A vocabulary must be created, and a syntax, and all the rest. I propose to talk only about the stage of creating vocabulary, but what I say should be understood to represent a strategy for use at all levels of the task.

The clue that got me past the I-don't-know-how-to-do-it stage is in Douglas Hofstadter-

<sup>8</sup>Sorry that all my quotations are from men.



er's magnificent science-fiction work,<sup>9</sup> *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*, on Page 73. He says: "When we are dealing with an infinite set to start with...the holes created by removing some subset may be very hard to define in any explicit way." That sentence, for me, was like the water in Archimedes's bathtub. I had only to take meta-reality as my "infinite set", and I could see where to go and how to proceed. But, because I am not male, I am not quite so taken by the idea that removing chunks from an infinity is going to leave holes in it; I think we can set that aside and consider the matter as follows.

*The task:* After men have taken a chunk here and a chunk there out of meta-reality, and have given the chunks names and decreed that the chunks are reality and that they are all there is, how do we go about expressing our perception of what they have left behind?

Meta-reality is a whole and undifferentiated substance, a seamless infinite unity. Upon this substance, human beings impose differentiations, using cognition and perception as mechanisms for "finding" them and language as a mechanism for expressing them. This process carves figures out of the semantic ground; suddenly we "discover" that those figures are "there". Naming them is a major function of language.<sup>10</sup> I am taking it as a given that all humans, male or female, have access to the same meta-reality. This is not trivial, by the way; I want that to be clear. But it is necessary if the hypothesis is to be explored.

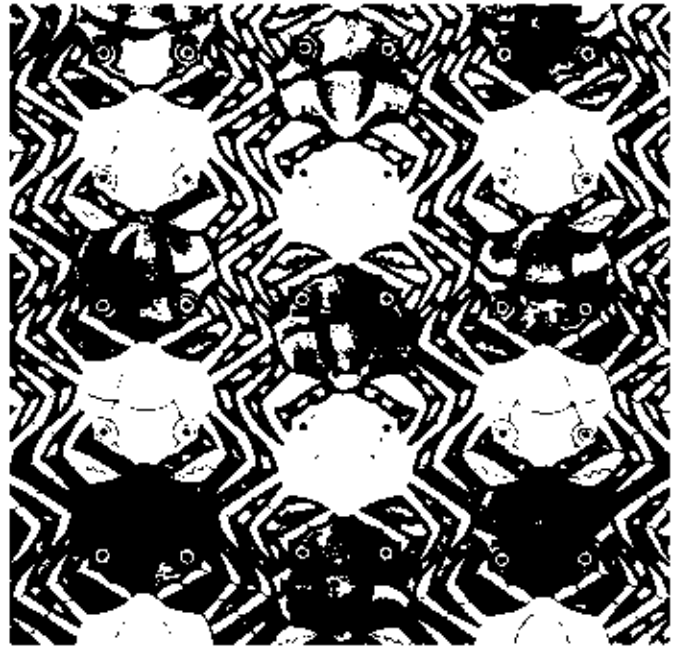
If female perceptions really are different, the only place to search for them is in the ground, i.e., in what has been left behind when the males established, and named, the figures. The finest discussion of this figure/ground distinction is of course in *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, to which I refer you without reservation. The most accessible example of perceiving ground as figure is the work of Escher; it's easier to draw my examples from there than to try to take them from Bach because, although almost everyone can "read" figures, not everyone can read music.<sup>11</sup>

In the Escher works that allow us to perceive ground as figure, and vice versa, we find two primary types:

<sup>9</sup>Yes, *GEB* is a science-fiction work; unlike most SF, it is heavier on the science than on the fiction. But the incorporation of the dialogs throughout the work places it squarely in our genre and leads us back at last to the undichotomized world of Galileo and all those other writers of dialogs.

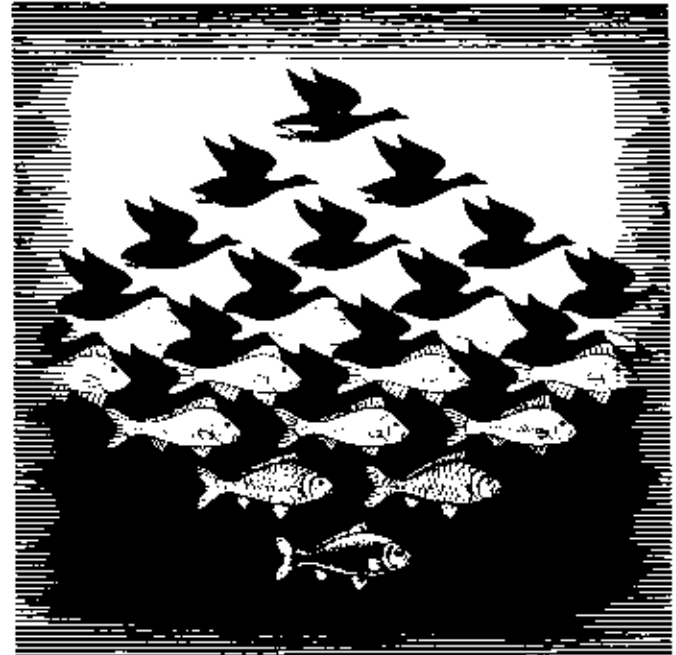
<sup>10</sup>This is what we are doing when we "see" things in clouds or open flames or wood grain or ink blots; the difference is vast, since we then find things already perceived and named, but it will do as an analogy.

<sup>11</sup>My math is not strong enough for me to be able to say whether what goes on relative to figure and ground in Escher and Bach is matched in the work of Gödel, but I would assume so, based on what I do know and on what Hofstadter has done.



M. C. Escher Crab Canon

(1) the ground is a reversal of the figure (e.g., the figure is black crabs and the ground is white crabs), and



M. C. Escher Sky and Water

(2) the ground is not just the figure with some distinctive feature (e.g., color) reversed, it is something completely different (e.g., the figure is fishes and the ground is birds).

Notice that in Type 2 the something-completely-different is always the same thing throughout the work, and it is chosen from the set of things already named. Notice that in both Types 1 and 2 we have fixed-pair relationships, one-to-one. You would find this true of the Bach works that allow us the same type of perception; for example, you would find it in the fugues. And in Bach you find the analog of Escher's gradual transformations of ground into figure into ground; in Bach, this is done by modulations.

I have said that a new language for women must be searched for in the ground. And it pleases me that "ground" has its other, usual meaning: the earth beneath our feet, the living soil. It is an appropriate place for women to search, and not only because we are so often closer to it than men.

If what we find in our search is simply the reversal of what men have found, then formally our new language will be simply made. We can just call every thing identified by man reality [thing]<sub>0</sub>, and everything in our new woman reality becomes [thing]<sub>1</sub>. The [fish]<sub>0</sub> of male reality becomes the [fish]<sub>1</sub> of woman reality, reversed for some distinctive feature.<sup>12</sup> In Escher, the reversed feature is color; for our new language, perhaps our sexual gender. This is easy to do formally; it is a single formal operation, applied everywhere. It would be more difficult pragmatically, since the differentiating feature may not be conveniently encoded for us in existing language. That is, [brother]<sub>0</sub> is already encoded for us as "sister", but we have no lexicalization for [tree]<sub>0</sub> or [freedom]<sub>0</sub>. But we can imagine how it would be done, and we can talk about it.

The next possibility—that women will perceive not just figure-reversal but something different—is again formally simple. Formally, man reality's [fish]<sub>0</sub> becomes woman reality's [fish]<sub>1</sub>, and so on for every perception.<sup>13</sup> However, the problems imposed by present language and logic become greater, for now the term [fish]<sub>1</sub> includes everything that is not [fish]<sub>0</sub>. Thus, in current logic and language, [fish]<sub>1</sub>, [tree]<sub>1</sub>, [brother]<sub>1</sub>, *ad infinitum*, are synonymous. The language would turn everything women perceived back into undifferentiated ground.

One way out of this is Escher's Type 2 schema: fish:figure::bird:ground, always paired like that. The pairings could be quite arbitrary (like the pairings of upside-down walbiri) but would be fixed pairs. Each encoded perception women would take from the ground would have to be given a name by those women. And it is possible to imagine how this would be done and possible to talk about it.

Notice, please, that in simple reversal (from [thing]<sub>0</sub> to [thing]<sub>1</sub>) the man perception dictates the form of the woman perception; this is what happens in  $\square$ , which is one possible expression of such a reversal. In the second system (from [thing]<sub>0</sub> to [thing]<sub>1</sub>) neither perception determines the other; they are mutually co-determined. The fish is there because its form makes the bird; the bird is there because its form makes the fish; neither is dominant.  $\Delta$  is one way of expressing this alternative. And both  $\square$  and  $\Delta$  are fixed-pair relations.

There is a third possibility, the one in which what is found in ground and is made into figure in woman language does not exist in a

fixed-pair relationship—either simple reversal or any other—with what male language has already made to be figure and has encoded as names. (And please don't be misled by the "noun" connotation of naming in English; the noun/verb distinction happens to be a perception after it has been encoded as a word.) This alternative can be imagined, but only by a constant vigilance. The pull of the patriarchal paradigm is almost irresistible; you keep "discovering" fixed-pair relations as your brain scans for pattern.

It may be that this is hard-wired in the human brain. If so, it is inescapable, and the task of forming a women's language lies in one of the first two alternatives. But I am not willing to take this as a given. First, I am going to do some investigation, now that—thanks to a number of science-fiction writers and Douglas Hofstadter—I know where to search for Reality  $\emptyset$ . I will let you know what I find.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>I have two books in progress on the subject set out in this piece; one is a theoretical work, and the other is a novel.

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#### The Caryatid by Robert Frazier



Here on the moon Titan,  
Hermes is the square root of mutation:  
a soup of genes that meshed,  
heliotropic flesh  
shaped like ceramicist's clay  
by hard-radiation baths and spectral sprays...

Hermes stumbles awkwardly  
through days like Picasso's *Guernica*,  
through lives like Chicago's *Dinner Party*,  
or simply *The Persistence of Vision*.  
Hermes's soul strains  
with the notes of pure John Cage discordia,  
or the harmonies of Holly Near,  
or simply *The Music of the Spheres*.  
Each hour is an alien cypher,  
yet time decodes.

That is the essential  
importance, the base trial.  
An androgyne strength offers renewal  
to an old species of fool.  
Hermes is the caryatid  
supporting an arch that threatens to crumble.  
The truss shaped like woman, shaped like man.

<sup>12</sup>In spoken English, you can pronounce [fish]<sub>1</sub> as "fish-prime".

<sup>13</sup>In spoken English, you can pronounce [fish]<sub>1</sub> as "un-fish".



## SHOW & TELL

### FILMS OF 1981

Richard S. Russell



Steven Fox

In looking at the SF, fantasy, and supernatural films of 1981, I will use a rating system of 1 (execrable) to 5 (superlative); in general, movies with ratings of 1 to 3 are to be avoided, those in the 4 to 5 range are recommended, and the rest are up to you. This batch has two films which were suitably downrated in addition to being awarded a 0 for male chauvinism, sexism, etc.; sadly, there were none deserving of a 5 for depicting an unusually enlightened attitude toward women. My opinions, of course, are just that: only opinions, and only mine.

To help sort things out, I'm going to group the films by categories of my own invention. Let's start with...

**The Biggies.** These are well financed films with aspirations to a large mass-market audience. The financing enables the film to have adequate money for all of the important elements: script, cast, effects and make-up (where unusual requirements exist), and post-production work, and—far from least—advertising and distribution.

*Raiders of the Lost Ark* (E) is basically an adventure film with a toehold in the fantasy category simply because it alleges that there are in fact some supernatural powers associated with the lost ark. It's exciting and entertaining, and the production values are excellent. But it is not serious enough to be a great film on the order of *2001*. The production values in *Superman 2* (V) are at least as good, but the terrible plot discrepancies which could be tolerated in *Superman 1* due to its novelty prevent this movie from attaining its full potential. Chris Reeve is still marvelous at portraying both the klutzy Kent and the man of steel, but Margot Kidder is beginning to pall as Lois Lane. *Outland* (5) (which should have been subtitled "High Noon in Outer Space") and *Altered States* (5) are solid SF, dealing as they do with space travel and experimentation. Both have fairly good casts and pretty decent effects. Neither one succeeds in getting the viewer to sympathize much with the characters or believe in the succession of plot developments.

*Clash of the Titans* (3) is a Ray Harryhausen film, which automatically means you can write off the acting (marionets), the writing ("See Perseus run."), and the sets (erector) and get right into the 1940s special effects. Sorry, Ray, the state of the art just doesn't allow stop-motion animation to be tolerable as

backup, let alone as the star of the show.

*The Second String* are movies which lack enough funding to do a thorough job in all areas. Of course, different films skimp in different areas, but all of them suffer.

*Escape from New York* (E) does the most with its limited resources, mainly because the plot specifies that everything occurs at night, thereby allowing the paucity of lighting to conceal the minimal nature of the sets. Kurt Russell (no relation) has effectively shaken his Disneyesque image with his Clint Eastwood imitation of the role of Snake Plissken. And the plot isn't half bad, either.

*Scanners* (5), the exploding-head movie à la *The Fury*, deals with some believable consequences of psionic powers and has an interesting twist ending. But it relies too much on gory effects for its impact. *Looker* (4) is similar to *Scanners* in that it follows up on the consequences of a single premise (in this case, a super-subliminal advertising technique which rivets people's attention to the point of near-catatonia) and also because that single device is inadequate to carry the full movie. In the case of *Looker*, the difference is made up by stretching the scenes and destroying the pacing.

*Condorman* (4) is a cute but highly improbable piece of fluff in which a comic-book artist gets to inhabit the role of his character, Condorman, with the financial assistance of the CIA. Undistinguished acting, and the danger is never really believable, since nobody is ever really hurt; obviously intended for the kiddie market.

*Tarzan the Ape Man* (0) is obviously aimed at the MCP no-brain market. It features Bo Derek in various states of undress and no plot. The heirs of ERB are suing. Bravo!

**Medieval Fantasy.** Most years, there isn't even one such movie, let alone enough to constitute a category. This year there are two. *Excalibur* (E) is another retelling of the Arthurian legend, this variant assuming the invention of chrome plating. It isn't bad if your taste runs in that direction, and it features moderately realistic stupidity and squalor, something which *Camelot* never even tried to do. If you've never heard of Arthur, Lancelot, and Guenevere before, it might even strike you as novel. I guess I'm jaded: it's been done before, folks, and better.

*Dragonlayer* (E), though, now there's another story. I weep for this film. It's one of the best of the year, and it went nowhere at

the box office. It features really realistic stupidity and squalor, not to mention duplicity, avarice, futility, devotion, bravery, cleverness, and the best damn dragon ever to immolate an overconfident missionary. Disney Studios, which has been in a slump lately in its own productions\*, was the subcontractor for the effects on this one, and proved that they still have the magic. The young actors were sort of fumble-footed and -tongued, which is exactly what their characters were supposed to be. Ralph Richardson was a dandy wizard. The plot was filled with opportunities for the audience to cheer for the oncoming cavalry, but the cavalry seldom materialized. Despite all the setbacks, though, the heroes struggled through. Damn it, it isn't heroism if it's easy. I truly hope that this film gets the word-of-mouth advertising it so richly deserves and gains a wider circulation than just the D&D and SCA folks who, I am sure, already treasure it as a minor masterpiece.

**Comedy.** *Time Bandits* (E) features the Monty Python touch, a fine Master of Evil in David Warner, and Ralph Richardson (once again) typecast as the Supreme Being. I would have preferred it, though, if it had been less frenetic; I never did figure out the names of all the dwarves, for instance. This one, too, did undeservedly poorly at the box office. *The Incredible Shrinking Woman* (5) plays the Richard Matheson story for laughs, with Lily Tomlin in the title role and several others, a semi-intelligent gorilla who's got the best lines in the picture (in a non-speaking role!), and a series of satiric commercials for the various products which triggered the shrinking process. The film also has Charles Grodin in his patented sincere-but-vacuous-husband role, which cost it a couple of points in my book, and it tended to drag at times. *Heartbeeps* (4) just didn't have much substance to it, and I wasn't fond of the concept of the Aqua robot (Bernadette Peters) being so obviously designed to function as a sex object; despite being only 75 minutes long, the plot was stretched near to breaking.

**Supernatural** movies included *Ghost Story* (4), *The Final Conflict* (3), *Deadly Blessing* (2), and *Planet of Horrors* (1). *Ghost Story*, like *The Changeling* last year, causes one to wonder why people 60 years dead bother to come back to scare the shit out of the old folks who did them in. Why not just wait a couple of years and let nature take its course? *The Final Conflict* is the third (and last, at last) in the Omen series; in the final conflict between Damien Thorne and "the Nazarene", I was rooting for both sides to lose. I won't waste time on the other two, and neither should you.

**Werewolf** movies are normally placed in the "supernatural" category, but 1981 had enough of them to qualify it as the Year of the Wolf (much as 1978 was the Year of the Bat) and to justify a separate category. All three films—*An American Werewolf in London*, *The Howling*, and *Wolfen*—score exactly average: 5. The only one to try a variation on the standard werewolf theme was *Wolfen*,

which suggested that the super-wolves turned into vapor instead of humans when they weren't actually doing their throat-ripping bit. *Wolfen* also featured an interesting visual effect (courtesy of Robert Blalack) which showed the world through the color-distorted vision of the wolfen while moving rapidly with the steadicam over piles of rubble; but the film gave no clue to what was happening, and it looked at first like a problem with the projector. Too, *Wolfen* starred Albert Finney (who also appeared in *Looker*) as a somewhat besotted police detective—not a character easy to identify with. The *London* film made use of broad-daylight scenes, similar to *The Shining*, but did not succeed in creating the anticipation necessary to horror as effectively as Kubrick's film. Werewolf films, of course, rely heavily on their transformation scenes, and these were pretty good; they were also the first to suggest how painful the transformation must be. But, somehow, Lon Chaney's transformations still strike me as more effective; don't ask me why.

**Animated** pictures looked fairly promising a couple of years ago (*Fantastic Animation Festival*, *Allegro Non Troppo*, others), but there was only one entry this year, the ambitious but disappointing *Heavy Metal* (30), an uneven collection of different segments animated by different studios based on the works of different artists who have appeared in the magazine of the same title. I'm not sure why all of the various "artists" involved seemed to believe that the anatomically correct woman comes equipped with two breasts each as large as her head. Even the otherwise fairly admirable, semi-heroic women were presented as sex objects. The animation was reasonably good, though the change from realistic to impressionistic to cartoonish was a bit jarring. And Richard Corben has undoubtedly milked his "Den" concept absolutely bone dry by now; time to move on to something new, Dick.

In summary, then, this wasn't exactly a banner year for genre films, but it wasn't a banner year for movies in general. I was disappointed that television had nothing to offer this year, after coming up with *The Martian Chronicles* and *The Lathe of Heaven* not so long ago. But films like *Dragonslayer* and *Escape from New York* prove that it's still possible to do a fairly decent job without big-name stars and a huge advertising budget. Not all films can be *Star Wars* (though I'm certainly grateful that some of them are), but all of them can use wit and imagination, as long as there's a market for it.

Market. That's us, folks. Ya pays yer money for trash, trash is what they're gonna keep sending. Talk up the good ones. Go back and see them again. Write letters. 2001 proved that SF films can be serious cinema; *A New Hope* proved that they can be successful; *Battle Beyond the Stars* (Yes, a Roger Corman production) proved they can be cheap and still not too bad. Sodon't let up the pressure: demand good movies, pay for them, and use the best advertising technique known to Madison Avenue—word of mouth.

One way or the other, we're going to get what we deserve.

\**The Black Hole*. Nuff said?



Continued from P. 9

his most applicable work for Jan's article is his *Castaways of Tanagar*, wherein two interstellar colonizers return to Earth 10,000 years from now. Each colony has evolved along some direction—biofeedback for one and genetic engineering for the other—to adapt themselves to their respective environments, but are either of them still human? Stableford has been consistently the most evolutionary-minded SF writer in the field....

Lucas's entire discussion of the probable nature of pre-civilization hunter-gatherer societies is weak compared to Raey Tannahill's section in her *Sex in History* (*Sex through the Ages* in England). Tannahill points out that women in hunter-gatherer societies would be pregnant or nursing (or both) most of the time, thus limiting their mobility.... *Sex in History* is a thoroughly fascinating book and oddly missing from Lucas's reading list. It covers the evolving relations between women and men through the ages to the present and across the major civilizations—all in a neutral historian's voice that one is more likely to get a man to read than any of Lucas's books; yet Tannahill continually comes to feminist conclusions.

Lucas concludes that there were four jobs (roles) in hunter-gatherer society: hunting and protecting for men and mothering and food gathering for women. Yet I wonder how men could protect women and children when they were so frequently away on hunting trips? I suspect that when it came to driving off predators all of them pitched in to the limit of their abilities. Niceties over "men's work" or "women's work" hardly matter during crises.

Tannahill contends, rather convincingly, that pregnancy in pre-civilization societies would be so common and so natural that no one would think of this as an unnatural condition requiring special explanation. Menstruation, on the other hand, would have been rare and awe-inspiring (bleeding that doesn't kill!)....

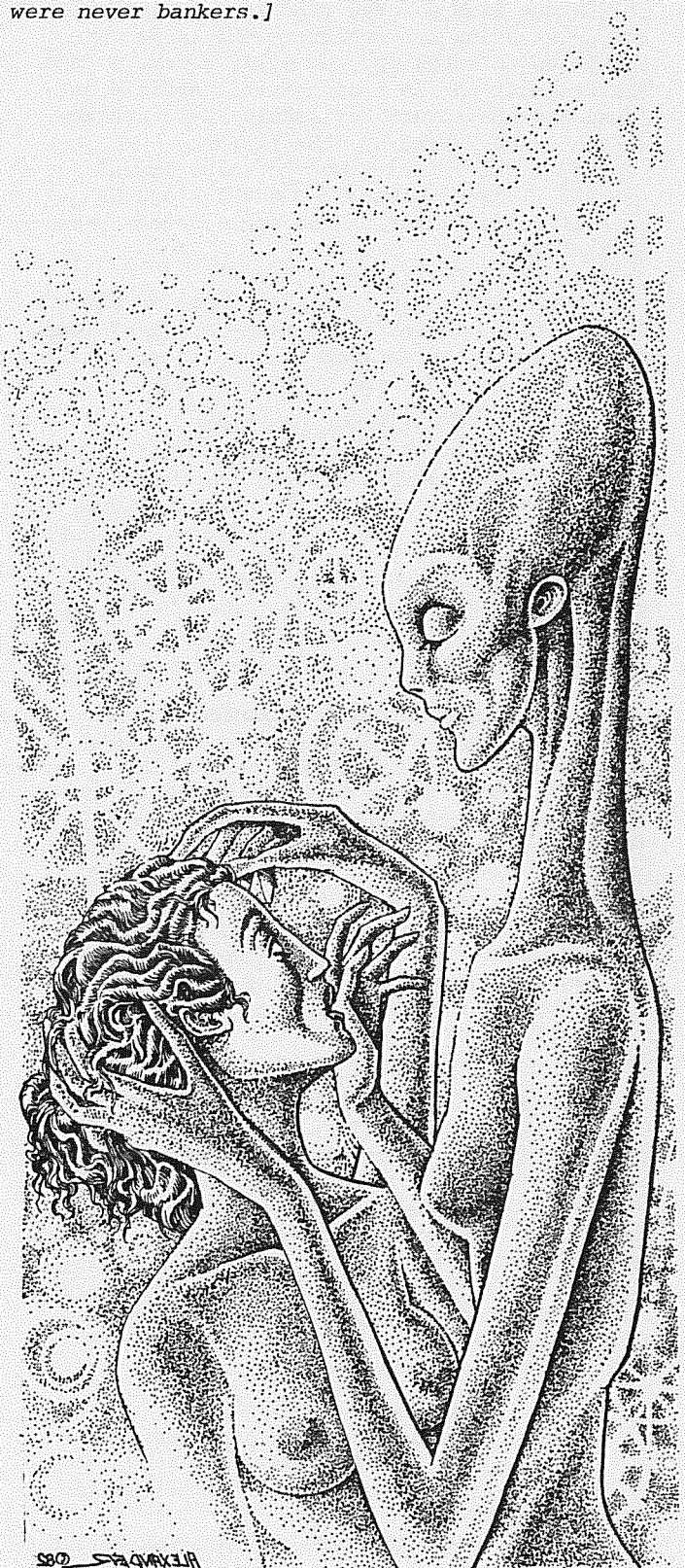
[Patty Lucas replies:

[To Alexis Gilliland: Gosh, I didn't mean to be rough on baboons; they are an admirably well adapted species. (But I still think that homo sapiens would have been more likely to evolve from a chimp or gorilla-type ancestor. Big and creative brains need a more "free-form" society to grow in than army brains do.) Concerning monogamy, I simply think that a matrilineal clan would be a natural outgrowth of the stable mother-with-young groups found among chimps and gorillas. Indeed, this is the social organization found in the least "civilized" peoples on Earth, especially in the last century or two before contact with white civilization.

[To Art Widner: I would love to meet this man over coffee and sweetrolls.

[To Judith Hanna and Brian Earl Brown: It is an excellent point that in pre-birth-control societies women would be pregnant or nursing most of the time and thus limited in some of their activities. However, even a thousand years ago there were hundreds of jobs that were neither dangerous nor very mobile. For instance, the proto-banker (money exchanger)

type jobs were not particularly life-threatening, but they were powerful and prestigious. Women were never bankers.]



John Alexander

WAHF

[We also heard from Alexandra Van Sweringen, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, Lee Pelton, John D. Owen, Loren MacGregor, Robert Frazier, Valerie Eads, and Cy Chauvin.]

### Upcoming Aurora Themes

We've extended our list of planned topics for future issues. You realize, of course, that the dates below are arbitrary and in no way commit us to anything. We will, however, take the subjects in the order given. Article outlines and sketch art for Issues 23-25 are acceptable now. Here are the topics:

♦#22 (1982 Fall): Time and Space Travel

♦#23 (1982-83 Winter): Education and SF

♦#24 (1983 Summer): Underappreciated Woman SF Writers

♦#25 (1983 Fall): Humor and SF

The previously announced topic of #24 was limited to a single (as-of-then-unchosen) woman writer, but we've decided to open it up to allow lots of different women to be covered.

### SF<sup>3</sup> Annual Meeting

The annual corporation board meeting, held every year the second Saturday in September, will be held this year on the second Sunday, so as not to conflict with the UW Badger football games. Show up at Union South (227 N. Randall Ave) at 1:30 p.m. on Sunday 1982 September 12. (If you have trouble sleeping, write for a free copy of the SF<sup>3</sup> annual-meeting minutes. We guarantee results even for hard-core insomniacs.)

### New Jobs for Women

Neva Haycraft started work in June as station engineer at WBAY-TV, Channel 2, in Green Bay, WI. Patty Lucas is now employed at the UW's Space Science and Engineering Center, which is probably the closest she'll ever get to NASA. Marge Roberts has returned to school to earn her teaching certificate, and works part time in Brown's Bookstore in Madison. Debra Schroeder gave up her career as an honest shyster and turned to a life of crime. She's now working for the Monroe (Wisconsin) County district attorney's office as a juvenile prosecutor.

### Kinast-Porters Advance Careers

Susan Kinast-Porter, MD, and Thomas R. Porter, RN (No, you didn't read that wrong. We may be boring, but we're usually politically correct.) have bought a house in Monroe, WI, where Susie will practice at the Monroe Medical Center starting in August. Tom will be going back to school this fall for a master's degree. Their dog, Queenie, has plans to dig a number of holes in their new back yard (located at 2302 11th St., Monroe, WI 53566).

### Boredom Abroad

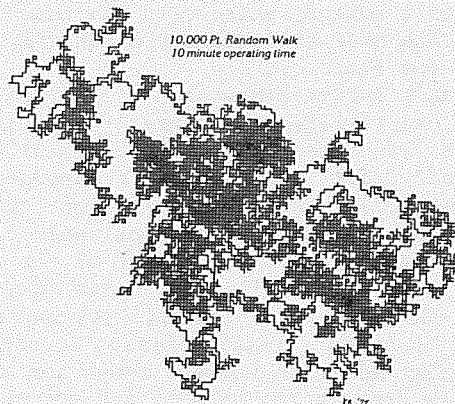
We can only hope that Madison boredom is not contagious. Look for news cessation from Europe when two SF<sup>3</sup> members will be traveling on the continent.

Carrie Root (Her married name was Harris.) is spending a month touring Europe this summer.

\* large sigh of envy \* Lynne Morse will be spending her junior year of college in Italy, starting in September. (Are we too boring?) We've tried to put her in touch with Italian fans. Her mailing address will be c/o Indiana/Wisconsin, Centro di Bologna, Largo Trombetti 3, 401126 Bologna, Italy.

### Lucas Rules

In honor of the arm-wrestling proficiency displayed by Patty Lucas, we are announcing the creation of "Lucas Rules": a tournament in which the losers advance to the championship round. (Eat your heart out, Marquis of Queensbury.)



### The Computer Considers Its Sexuality

by Pat M. Kuras

software complexity  
chips of integrated circuitry  
feed warm pulse  
to computer brain  
hums an ambiance of  
knowledge reacts to  
keyed questions considers  
the sexuality of computers  
does not compute  
insufficient data  
sexuality of the sexes  
computers are machines  
independent of sexual process  
hence asexual  
but perhaps a carry-over  
from human creators could  
a designed instrument  
hold human qualities?  
sexuality sexuality  
does not compute  
insufficient data  
software complexity  
chips of integrated circuitry  
feed warm pulse  
overheating temperature  
rising  
resistors and wires' insulation  
wary of meltdown  
what of a computer's sexuality?  
insufficient data  
does not compute  
does not compute  
repetitious evasions from  
the computer  
elusive escaping  
parries the question  
with deft and final stroke  
does not compute  
and the machine  
hums warmly into the night



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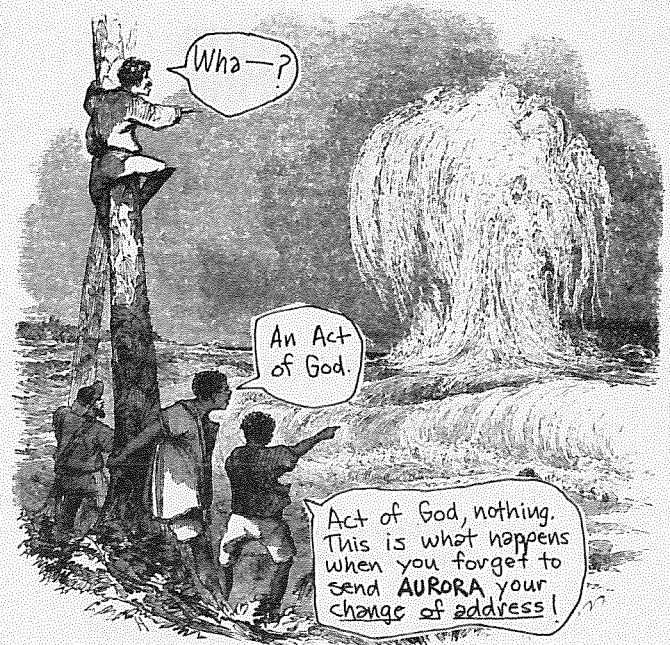
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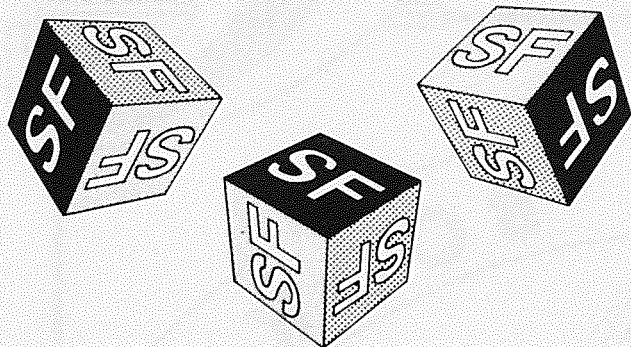
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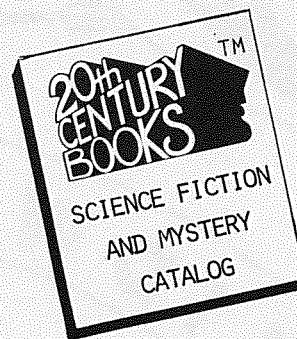


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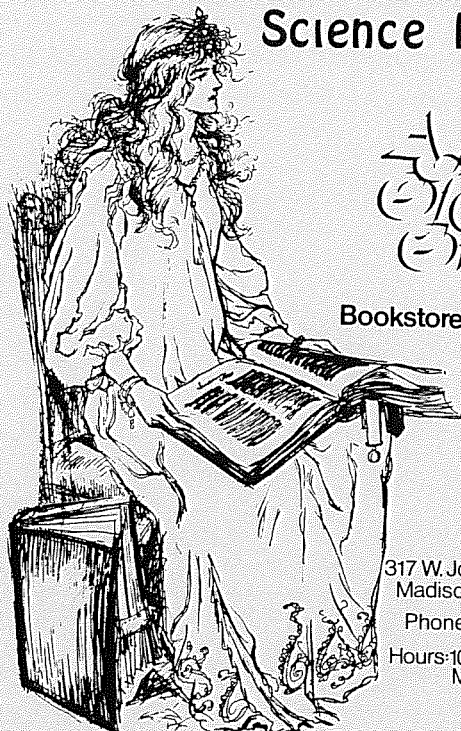
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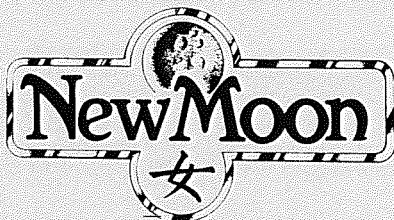
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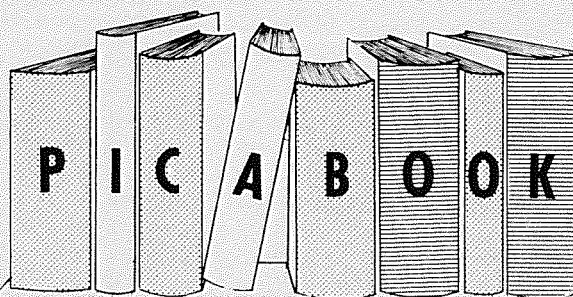


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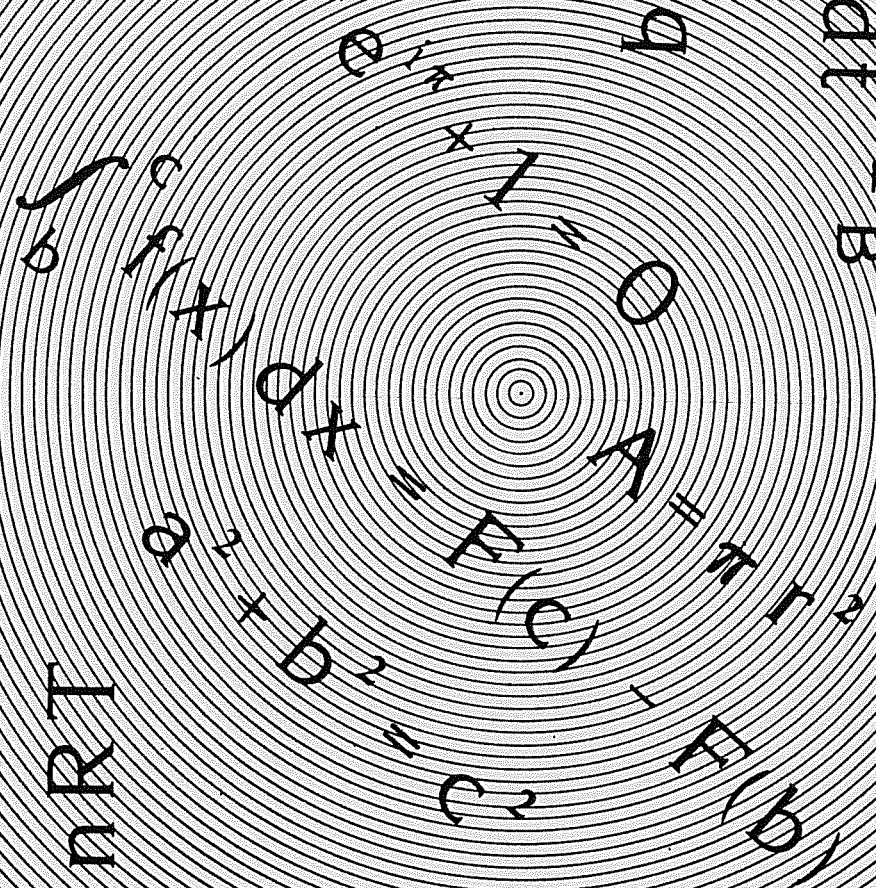
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